FROM WOOD SHAVINGS TO AN ART COLLECTION: THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE LAING ART GALLERY (NEWCASTLE) AND THE CREATION OF ITS PERMANENT COLLECTION (1904-1957)

L. ANGUIX VILCHES

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LAIA ANGUIX VILCHES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the creation, early history and development of the permanent collection of the Laing Art Gallery - the first public art museum in Newcastle upon Tyne - between its opening in 1904 and the death of its first and perhaps most emblematic curator, C. Bernard Stevenson (1874-1957). The Laing arrived late in comparison to the Victorian boom of 'civic pride' which motivated the creation of most regional art galleries in Britain during that period. Besides this belated opening, the gallery faced additional problems: it was built on an inadequate and awkward site which constrained its ability to function properly and to expand its permanent collection, and it carried a starting debt. Moreover, it possessed no nucleus collection, nor funds to purchase one. This thesis analyses the way in which Stevenson succeeded in overcoming these adverse opening conditions, managing to put together three quarters of the Laing's current collection and undertaking 'the work of two lives' to build up a comprehensive and diverse display of British painting.

The thesis also reveals the impact of the main historical events of the first half of the twentieth century upon the early history of the gallery and in the creation of its collections. It studies the relationship of the Laing with collectors and dealers, artists, and other regional art galleries, as well as management details such as financing, acquisition policies, and the connexion established with its audiences and with public powers. Beyond the local relevance of the Laing as the flagship venue of Tyneside museums, the significant contribution to scholarship of this thesis is the light it sheds on the unique way in which this permanent collection was formed. Moreover, the investigation enhances knowledge of British provincial art galleries at a more general level: because the Laing's history mirrors the evolution of other local authority museums at the time, this thesis provides an extensive case study which helps to establish the singular importance of regional art galleries to British cultural history during the first half of the twentieth century.

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When I first started researching about the Laing, I believed it would be a very lonesome task. Now I realise that I would have never been able to write this thesis without the help of all the individuals who have kindly contributed their time and expertise to this project. I am especially indebted to my PhD supervisors, Dr Matthew Potter and Dr Michael Johnson, for their valuable advice, their constant encouragement and their helpful guidance: they have both displayed a patience beyond their duties to polish my language skills and to help me find my way through the British academic system. I also wish to acknowledge the assistance of Northumbria University for providing the funding that allowed me to undertake this research on a full-time basis: this has been a life-changing opportunity. I am most grateful to the Visual and Material Culture Group in Northumbria University, especially to Dr Elizabeth Kramer and Dr Victoria Horne for their help in key moments of the PhD. Furthermore, I owe a special thanks to the fellow doctoral students with whom I have been able to discuss my research: Massimiliano Papini, from Northumbria University, and Melanie Stephenson, from Newcastle University, have provided intellectual and personal inspiration, and have helped to contextualise the Laing in the wider cultural panorama of nineteenth and twentieth-century North-East England.

I am most grateful to all the curators, archivists and librarians who have contributed their time and provided access and guidance to Laing-related archival collections, especially Sarah Richardson and Julie Milne at the Laing Art Gallery, and Ruth Seldon and Niall Hodson at the Shipley Art Gallery, as well as local historian Anthea Lang and PhD student Philip Dean for kindly sharing the information regarding the Shipley anniversary exhibition ‘A Gallery built in Wartime’. In the same way, I also wish to acknowledge the assistance of the staff at Gateshead Public Library, Tyne and Wear Archives and Newcastle City Library, especially Sarah Mulligan at Newcastle Local History Section. My heartfelt thanks to the Friends of the Laing for letting me browse through their archival material and for sharing their invaluable knowledge on the history of the gallery: I cannot name them all here, but I want to acknowledge the support offered by Elizabeth McCaffrey and Barbara Hazeldine. Above all, I want to thank Michael Stevenson for entrusting precious family records

to me: having the opportunity to talk to a direct descendant of the Laing's first curators was already a gift in itself, and this thesis would have never existed in its present format without his generous help. I am also glad to have met Sylvia Pinkerton, whom I want to thank for having shared her family memories and records. Without Michael and Sylvia, this research would have missed essential aspects of CBS' life and career.

On a more personal side, I would like to convey my heartfelt thanks to all the family and friends here and abroad, who - more or less unknowingly – have kept me sane during these last three years. I cannot name them all here, but I would like to mention my parents and my sister Alba, the chatty Rufas and the loud tribe at the Spanish Cafe. And most especially, Pep and little Ruso for their everyday companionship.

DECLARATION

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others. The work was done in collaboration with the Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM).

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the University Ethics Committee on 23-01-2018.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 84,473 words.

Name: Laia Anguix Vilches

Signature:

Date: 2nd of March 2020

INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates the creation, early history and development of the permanent collection of the Laing Art Gallery - the first public art museum in Newcastle upon Tyne - between its opening in 1904 and the death of its first curator, C. Bernard Stevenson (1874-1957). In this research, Stevenson's (henceforth referred to as CBS) achievements over five decades have been framed by three determining factors: the Laing's local and historical context, the absence of a nucleus collection and the gallery's continuous funding difficulties.[1] The in-depth analysis of the Laing and its evolution aims to offer not only an understanding of the consequences of the main historical events of the first half of the twentieth century in the gallery's daily management and in the acquisition of artworks, but also a better knowledge of the complex interactions taking place with donors, art galleries, audiences, political structures, dealers, artists and Northumbrian society in general, in the awareness that

> The museums' history is the result of a complex set of interactions and its response is not governed solely by those in authority but also by the roles of individuals such as curators, artists, designers and benefactors, by its audiences and by the cultural context of the time.[2]

Aims, scope and contribution to knowledge

Current museological scholarship such as the Museum Ecosystem theory tends to see museums not as mere repositories of objects, but as places for collective cultural production, thus implying the involvement of the whole community and a shared responsibility in the shaping of their history, the creation of their collections and the making of their exhibitions.[3] Engaging with this approach, this research has paid special attention to the social, cultural and political structures underpinning the

[1] Although his full name was Arthur Charles Bernard Stevenson, relatives and acquaintances usually called him 'Stevenson' or simply 'CBS'. Laverna Stevenson - the curator's wife - refers to him as 'CBS' in her memoirs, which have been quoted several times in this thesis. For this reason, and to differentiate him from his son Collingwood Maltby Stevenson (1914-1984), who was the second curator of the gallery, all the allusions to the Laing's first curator in this thesis name him as CBS.
[2] Pearson, C. (2008). *Curators, Culture and Conflict. The effects of the Second World War on Museums in Britain, 1926-1965.* (Unpublished Doctoral thesis). UCL, London, U.K., p.24.
[3] See: Jung, Y. (2011) 'The art museum ecosystem: a new alternative model'. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 26:4, 321-338, DOI: 10.1080/09647775.2011.603927.

Laing's history and its decision-making processes, and particularly, to its local donors and Committee members, in the awareness that

> to control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths. It is also the power to define the relative standing of individuals within a community. […] It is precisely for this reason that museums and museum practices become objects of fierce struggle and impassioned debate. What we see and what we do not see in art museums […] is closely linked to larger questions about who constitutes the community and who defines its identity.[4]

However, beyond the local relevance of these power structures and of other regional issues (such as the cultural idiosyncrasy of the North-East or the impact of its peripheral condition), the study of the Laing is significant on a wider scale for several reasons. Firstly, this is because of the unique way in which its permanent collection was formed. Although the Laing was not the only British regional art gallery to open without a collection, it was probably the only one unable to cover this initial handicap with the prompt arrival of either funding or significant donations, whether private or public. Indeed, for reasons that will be discussed in this thesis, local patrons were not initially generous with their donations. As Macleod (1989) argues:

> It was absurd, considering the richness in Newcastle collections, that when the Laing opened its doors in 1904 it had to rely on loans [from] as far away as London, since it did not own a single work of art. Among themselves, Newcastle's cultural elite possessed all of the money and taste required for a permanent collection of note. While they generously donated parks and hospitals to the city in which they had earned their fortunes, they did not include art in their philanthropic gestures.[5]

These starting circumstances contrast sharply with those of other British regional galleries. For instance, Birmingham Art Gallery, which opened in 1885, had a foundational collection of artworks that had been purchased four years earlier for £17,000, and by 1888 had received a further £27,000 towards additional acquisitions, whilst artworks worth £45,000 had been donated.[6] The Walker opened in 1873 with sixty-five artworks previously acquired by the Council, and –unlike the

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[4] Duncan, C. (1995). *Civilizing Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums.* London and New York: Routledge, p.9.

[5] Macleod, D.S. (1989). 'Private and Public Patronage in Victorian Newcastle.' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 52, pp.188-208. https://www.jstor.org/stable/751544.

[6] Morris, E. and Stevens, T. (2013). *The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1873-2000.* Bristol: Sanson & Co., p.14.

Laing - its building provided enough space for a major collection to be developed gradually. Moreover, its temporary exhibitions were very profitable: for instance, in 1879 its Autumn Exhibition generated a profit of £2,994, which was reinvested in purchases. To overcome the 'self-induced bar against buying works of art from public funds, in the long-standing prejudice that art was frivolous and unworthy of serious consideration', most regional art galleries inherited collections from pre-existing institutions or from private donors.[7] Bury Art Gallery, which opened in 1903, acquired its founding collection of British art in 1897 from the paper manufacturer Thomas Wrigley, whilst Manchester Art Gallery took over the Royal Manchester Institution in 1882, with the added input that the Council promised to devote £2,000 per year to the purchase of works of art.[8] The Laing did not receive a comparable amount of public funding until the late 1960s, having instead been created as an empty building, bearing a debt of £2,000 to the city Council and not receiving any public funding during its first two years. To overcome these adverse circumstances and to build its art collection, the gallery had to develop unique collecting and managing strategies, whose success and reach are examined thoroughly in this thesis.

Beyond the Laing's singularities, this research aims to enhance knowledge of British provincial art galleries at a more general level, and to promote the further study of the history of museums as a significant part of British cultural history. Indeed, in its intersection of social issues, politics and culture, the early history of the Laing goes beyond local interest to mirror the evolution of other local authority museums during the first half of the twentieth century, thus offering an extensive case study which contributes to scholarship about the significance of these institutions. Aspects such as the museums' ability to adapt to the challenges of changing historical circumstances, the relationship between culture and politics at local and governmental levels – including taxation, interaction with national museums, contemporary debates about central support for provincial galleries and the creation of state arts organisations like the CEMA (1940) and the Arts Council (1946) – have been linked with the Laing's particular case, thus providing a new understanding of their impact on regional galleries. The figure of curators, their intentions, their training

[7] Waterfield, G. (2015). *The People's Galleries. Art, Museums and exhibitions in Britain, 1800-1914.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p.206.
[8] Ibid.

in different periods, their interaction with other curators and their increasing professionalism are central to this research, as well as the role of the Museums Association (est.1889) in advocating for the profession. The later was especially significant in helping the Laing to overcome its peripherality and to stay connected with contemporary museum trends, with its audiences and with other galleries.

Another substantial element is the role of regional museums, with its characteristic tension between peacetime educational aims and wartime duty of displaying patriotic propaganda, both intertwined with financial struggles. Whilst regional galleries 'sought to be educators of high culture, constraints on finance and acquisitions often forced them to become agents of commercial art.'[9] The money issues and the poor support from local tax (which were common to many municipal galleries) assume capital proportions in the Laing's history because of the absence of a collection. Therefore, the efforts to interact with the London art market and obtain and manage donations both from private collectors and from public funding bodies (such as the Contemporary Art Society or the National Arts Collection Fund) are analysed. In connection to acquisitions and exhibitions, issues of taste and the reception of modern art are also dealt with here. These aspects offer an opportunity to deal with museum policies and acquisition strategies, thus contributing to scholarship about the role of museums as art collectors and their interaction with the art market.

Lastly, this thesis aims to contribute to the current museological debate about the purpose of museums and their responsibilities towards society and audiences. The research delves into the influence of politics in museums and the art world, providing evidence of the impact of power structures in the creation of public art collections. It also brings new evidence of the everyday management of a regional art gallery, demonstrating that development is not always linear nor positive, and showing the museums' ability to adapt to history and change. Recovering this legacy can help today's art galleries to understand their present and their continued significance, thus providing them with a greater awareness of their place in cultural life. The Laing's story of success against adverse circumstances can easily be related to present times, thus providing new inspiration for the management of currently underfunded local authority museums. Therefore, this research aims to encourage local art

[9] Moore, J. (2018). *High culture and Tall Chimneys. Art institutions and urban society in Lancashire, 1780-1914.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.96

galleries to re-examine their own past, with the hope that the strategies used to face past challenges may help them to rediscover resources to interact more collaboratively with audiences and to challenge the traditional aura of distant and lifeless institutions.

Methodology

This research offers an in-depth historical analysis of the early Laing, whilst connecting the gallery with its contemporary social and political circumstances. This contextual and historical approach, related to cultural studies, has thoroughly examined archival material and contemporary primary sources. Uncommonly for regional galleries, a wealth of archival documents (such as bill books, committee reports, letter books and curators' reports) has survived and been made publicly accessible at the Tyne and Wear Archives. Other documents (such as daybooks and letters from dealers) are still kept at the Laing, where they have been consulted thanks to the help of Sarah Richardson, Keeper of Art at the gallery. Moreover, further research through the Friends of the Laing has resulted in the valuable opportunity of meeting Michael Stevenson (CBS's grandson and Collingwood Stevenson's son) and his cousin Sylvia Pinkerton (CBS' granddaughter). Both of these individuals have preserved and kindly lent precious family and Laing-related documents such as news-cuttings, letters, photographs, personal diaries (especially, Laverna Stevenson's memoirs) and Collingwood Stevenson's thesis for the Museums' Association diploma, which has been a valuable first-hand guide to the Laing's acquisition policy in the 1950s.[10] These documents have provided a more personal insight into the lives and thoughts of the people in charge of the gallery, whilst other archival documents external to the Laing, such as the Newcastle Council Proceedings or the papers of the Pen and Palette Club, have provided primary evidence of the city's cultural and political background in the early twentieth century.

However, the research does not end at the local level, but instead aims to highlight both the Laing's uniqueness and its connection to other British regional art galleries.

[10] Most of the press reports quoted in this thesis have been extracted from the news-cuttings books belonging to Michael Stevenson. These books list the date and name of the newspaper in which the news was published, but not their page. For this reason, they are referenced as n.p. in the thesis' footnotes.

To achieve this comparative approach and to evidence the complexities of museum work in the first half of the twentieth century, thorough attention has been given to other museum sources of the period, in the awareness that it was during these years when museology developed as a discipline.[11] The part played by Britain in this global movement, as well as its contribution to the theory and practice of museums, are well portrayed in three seminal sets of documents: the series of *Museums Journal* issues published monthly by the Museums' Association (henceforth referred to as MA) and the Miers and Markham Reports. On the one hand, the *Museums Journal* - which collected the voices of the curators of regional galleries and the debates surrounding museum practice - has been used to investigate the concerns of the profession and the issues and ideas of CBS' contemporaries, thus giving points of comparison with his curatorial work at the Laing. On the other hand, the Miers Report (1928) and the Markham Report (1938) - the two surveys of the UK's museums commissioned by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust – have provided contextual background to the conditions of British regional galleries during the first half of the twentieth century and to CBS' interest in education and interaction with audiences. Indeed, in their aim to improve the professional standards and the public perception of regional galleries, both surveys spoke against the museums' traditional emphasis on collecting and conservation.[12] Although the outbreak of the Second World War hindered the implementation of their innovative approach, and their recommendation of Government support for provincial galleries was never put into practice, their impact on CBS' work during the interwar and war years is considerable.

Literature Review

Secondary literature has helped to compensate for the potential bias and the unequal coverage of primary sources and to provide ground for a critical approach, contextual research and comparison with other galleries. These sources can be divided into three main groups. Firstly, literature regarding late-Victorian Newcastle

[11] For details about the Madrid Museum Conference (1934) and the creation of the International Museums Office, see Jamin, J.B. (2017). 'The Madrid conference (1934). History of an international event at the origin of modern museography'. *Il Capitale Culturale. Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage,* num.15. Macerata: Universita di Macerata.
[12] Lewis, G. (1989). *For Instruction and Recreation. A centenary History of the Museums Association.* London: Quiller Press, p.55.

has provided information about social history and local idiosyncrasies, and thus has been used as a base to analyse the circumstances that delayed the opening of the Laing in relation to the boom of regional galleries taking place across the UK in the 1880s and 1890s. Authors dealing with Newcastle's historical context include Colls and Lancaster (2001), Faulkner (1996), Hepple (1976), Moffat and Rosie (2005) and Purdue (2011) amongst others.[13] Some of the scholars referenced in the analysis of Newcastle's arts scene at the turn of the century are McLeod (1989), Mumba (2008) and Usherwood and Bowden (1984).[14] Nevertheless, most of the research on Newcastle's history and culture (except certain chapters in Colls and Lancaster and Faulkner), has focused on the Victorian period, and very little - besides Mumba's analysis of early exhibitions of the Northern Counties – has been written about the work carried out by the Laing after its controversial opening. This thesis has aimed to fill this gap by accessing the primary sources described in the previous section.

Secondly, comparison with other regional galleries has been established through museum history sources. Although these have grown considerably during the last few years, most of them focus on national museums, whose features render them unsuitable for comparison with the Laing.[15] Instead, sources regarding the history of British regional galleries are still few, and they tend to focus mainly on the 'gallery boom' of the Victorian period: therefore their coverage of the circumstances surrounding later and smaller museums like the Laing is only partial. Nevertheless, Lewis (1989) has provided background for the connection between provincial curators and the MA, whilst the work of authors such as Hill (2005) and Waterfield

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[13] Colls, R. (2007). *Northumbria. History and Identity. 547-2000.* Chichester: Phillimore & Co; Colls, R. and Lancaster, B. (eds.) (2001) *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*. Chichester: Phillimore; Faulkner, T.E. (1996). *Northumbrian Panorama. Studies in the History and Culture of North East England*. London: Octavian Press Limited; Hepple, L. W (1976). *A History of Northumberland and Newcastle upon Tyne*. London: Phillimore & Co; Moffat, A. and Rosie, G. (2005). *Tyneside. A History of Newcastle and Gateshead from the Earliest Times*. Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing; Purdue, A.W. (2011) *Newcastle, the Biography*. Stroud: Amberley.

[14] Macleod, D. (1989). 'Avant-garde patronage in the North East'. *Pre-Raphaelites: Painters and Patrons in the North-East.* Exhibition catalogue. Newcastle: Laing Art Gallery; Macleod, D. (1989). 'Private and Public Patronage in Victorian Newcastle.' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 52*, 188-208; Mumba, R. (2008) *Class, nation and localism in the Northumberland art world, 1820-1939.* (Doctoral thesis, Durham University, Durham, U.K.). Retrieved from http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2243/; Usherwood, P. & Bowden, K. (1984). *Art for Newcastle. Thomas Miles Richardson and the Newcastle Exhibitions 1822-1843.* Exhibition catalogue. Newcastle: Tyne and Wear County Council Museums.

[15] See, for instance: Bennett, T. (1995). *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics*. London and New York: Routledge; Conlin, J. (2006). *The Nation's Mantelpiece: A History of the National Gallery.* London: Pallas Athene; Kehoe, E.S. (2002). *The British Museum: the cultural politics of a national institution, 1906-1939*. ((Unpublished Doctoral thesis). University of London, London, U.K.; Stearn, W.T. (1981). *The Natural History Museum at South Kensington: a history of the British Museum (Natural History), 1753-1980.* Portsmouth: Heinemann; Whitehead, C. (2005). *The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth Century Britain: The Development of the National Gallery (Perspectives on Collecting).* London: Routledge; Wilson, D.M. (2002). *The British Museum: a history.* London: British Museum Press.

(2015) has added valuable details to the wider perspective of British regional galleries in aspects such as funding, patronage and management.[16] Moreover, scholarly research on specific historical periods has offered key elements of comparison with the actions undertaken by different museums in exceptional circumstances: Kavanagh (1995) has been referenced for the First World War, whilst Pearson (2008 and 2017) has been quoted in connection to the educational activities of regional galleries during the interwar period and the Second World War.[17] However, the overview offered by these texts is much more general than the one pursued in this thesis, whilst specific research on individual regional art galleries is still very limited: the only example similar in aims to this thesis would be the study of the Walker Art Gallery by Morris and Stevens (2013).[18] Despite the obvious differences in size and funds between both institutions, similarities in management issues have been highlighted, as well as CBS' connection with E.R. Dibdin (curator of the Walker between 1904-1918), in order to evidence the common issues affecting regional galleries globally, as well as the network existing between the first British curators. Recently, new scholarship - such as Baeza Ruiz (2017) and Moore (2018) - has been adopting this closer examination of the management of regional museums: all these texts, together with research currently being undertaken by fellow PhD students Melanie Stephenson on the Hatton Art Gallery (Newcastle) and Simon Spier on the Bowes Museum (Barnard Castle, County Durham) offer promising ground for a wider comparative approach to northern English museums.[19]

Lastly, the Laing's efforts to create an art collection have been put in the context of the wider British art world of the first half of the twentieth century through literature related to the British art market (Fletcher and Helmreich (2011)), the Summer Exhibitions at the Royal Academy (Hallett and Turner (2018)) and the several funding bodies impacting on the acquisition and collecting policies of regional

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[16] Hill, K. (2005). *Culture and class in public museums, 1850-1914*. Aldershot: Ashgate; Lewis, G. (1989). *For Instruction and Recreation. A centenary History of the Museums Association*. London: Quiller Press; Waterfield, G. (2015). *The People's Galleries. Art, Museums and exhibitions in Britain, 1800-1914*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

[17] Kavanagh, G. (1994). *Museums and the First World War. A social history*. London: Leicester University Press; Pearson, C. (2008). *Curators, Culture and Conflict. The effects of the Second World War on Museums in Britain, 1926-1965.* (Unpublished Doctoral thesis). UCL, London, U.K; Pearson, C. (2017). *Museums in the Second World War: Curators, Culture and Change*. Routledge: London and New York.

[18] Morris, E. and Stevens, T. (2013). *The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1873-2000.* Bristol: Sanson & Co.

[19] Baeza Ruiz, A. (2017). *The Road to Renewal: Refiguring the Art Museum in Twentieth-Century Britain*. (Doctoral Thesis, University of Leeds, Leeds, U.K.); Moore, J. (2018). *High culture and tall chimneys: Art institutions and urban society in Lancashire, 1780–1914.* Manchester: Manchester University Press. See also: Anguix, L. (forthcoming). 'A collection of mere travesties of time-honoured originals.' The rejection of the Shipley bequest. *Journal of the History of Collections.*

galleries (Bowness (1991), and Summerfield (2007)).[20] Also, in order to trace the provenance of the Laing's main acquisitions and to enhance their significance in comparison with similar examples by the same artists, the research has used several catalogues raisonnés, such as Swanson (1990) for Alma-Tadema or Wildenstein (2002) for Gauguin.[21]

Chapter structure

This thesis has been articulated through a thematic axis, with each of its four chapters focusing on one of the elements impacting the early history of the Laing and the development of its collection. Therefore, the first chapter ('The Place') deals with the local panorama, describing Newcastle's idiosyncrasies and cultural context in the late-Victorian period and analysing the art tastes of the cultural elites and the melting-pot of art enterprises preceding the opening of the Laing, with the aim to explain how this confusing cultural environment may have contributed to the delay in the creation of a public gallery. Because of its impact on the acquisition of the collection, this chapter pays special attention to the Laing building and to the troublesome site offered by the Council for its construction, whilst discussing some of the creative solutions invented by the curator to overcome the problems, and the difficulties he encountered in implementing these solutions. The chapter concludes with a detailed analysis of the fate of the most promising of those solutions, the Joicey Museum.

Chapter 2 ('The Time') offers a chronological overview of the Laing's first fifty years, detailing its opening circumstances in connection with the Edwardian British arts scene, the art market and the legal framework regulating public art galleries at that time, and exploring how the historical context affected its development and impacted

[20] Bowness, A. et al. (1991). *British Contemporary Art 1910-1990. Eighty years of collecting by the Contemporary Art Society*. London: Herbert Press; Fletcher, P. and Helmreich, A. (2011). *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850-1939.* Manchester: Manchester University Press; Hallett, M. and Turner, S.V. (2018). *The Great Spectacle. 250 years of the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition*. London: Royal Academy of Arts; Summerfield, A. (2007). *Interventions: Twentieth-century art collection schemes and their impact on local authority art gallery and museum collections of twentieth century British art in Britain*. (Doctoral thesis, UCL, London, U.K.).

[21] Swanson, V.G. (1990). *The biography and catalogue raisonne of the paintings of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema*. London: Garton&Co; Wildenstein, D. (2002). *Gauguin: a savage in the making: catalogue raisonne of the paintings (1873-1888).* Milano: Skira.

upon the growth of its permanent collection. In this way, the Laing is presented as a case study of the ways in which small museums managed to cope with the rapid succession of world-changing circumstances taking place over a relatively short timeframe. Links are established between the gallery's evolution and wider cultural and museological issues, as well as with key historical events, such as the two World Wars, the Great Depression or the post-war period.

Chapter 3 ('The People') discusses the role of those in charge of the gallery, as the decision-makers whose efforts made the collection possible, disclosing the impact of their training, knowledge, skills and personal connections on the creation of that collection. The Laing's double-headed management scheme (with a curator in charge of technical matters and a Committee deciding upon finances and representation) is dissected. Therefore, the first section deals with CBS' career and motivations, whilst also including a broader picture of the curatorial profession in the period. The second section describes the gallery's management and working routines, focusing, instead, on the members of the Laing Committee as representatives of the city's political and cultural elites. Because of their impact in the daily running of the gallery and the decision-making processes, the Laing's ever-present issues of underfunding and understaffing have a relevant presence in this chapter.

Chapter 4 ('The Artworks') focuses on the Laing collection. It analyses the reasons for the bias towards British art in the gallery's acquisition policy and the mechanisms used to pursue this policy on a low budget, highlighting how financial struggle conditioned the selection of artworks to purchase and promoted the active search for donations. It also describes how these donations further strengthened the British and North Eastern character of the collection, whilst promoting engagement with donors and living artists. Within this context, the scope and reach of the gallery's two main purchasing funds (the Wigham Richardson Fund, for watercolours, and the William Glover Fund, for local art) are discussed, whilst highlighting their impact on the creation of the collection and on the recurrence of the Laing's main annual event: the Northern Counties Exhibition. The chapter concludes with the analysis of key artworks acquired during CBS' period, which are used as examples of the success of the Laing's policies and acquisition techniques.

CHAPTER 1: THE PLACE

'…a community that had refused for centuries to consider the arts as anything but trifling amusements.'[1]

Museums are conditioned by the societies which create them. Their potential for education, conservation, discovery and research closely depends on the place where they exist. Simultaneously, museums help to build the identity of the cities which host them. As Carol Duncan states, 'they are spaces in which communities can work out the values that identify them as communities.'[2] The present chapter studies the ways in which Newcastle provided the Laing with its distinctive features, evidencing how both the city and the site conditioned the birth of the gallery and the growth of its permanent collection.

This chapter is divided into three sections: **section A** describes the impact of nineteenth-century Newcastle's idiosyncrasy in the comparatively late opening of the Laing and in the award of its deficient site. It analyses the city's unique cultural changes in connection with a financial prosperity conditioned by a late, fast and disordered industrialization, the pre-eminence of liberal, radical and labour local governments, the social representativeness of shipbuilders and factory owners, and the pressure of a rapid urban growth. Because of these factors, interest in culture and art reached Newcastle relatively late compared to other English cities, and, once it arrived, it developed through the overlapping of different associations insufficiently supported by the local authorities, thus provoking a confusing environment that may have contributed to delay the creation of a public art gallery. This section also discusses the art tastes of the 'small, interlocking group of business families who were creating the city's economic wealth', trying to understand the reasons why - although most of these families possessed personal fortunes and art collections - in

[1] Scott, W.B. (1892). *Autobiographical notes of the life of William Bell Scott*. London: W. Minto, p. 178.
[2] Duncan, C. (1995). *Civilizing Rituals: inside public art museums*. London: Routledge, p.134.

the end the Laing was funded by a wine merchant lacking any connection with the art world.[3]

Section B deals with the location of the Laing within Newcastle. It describes the gallery building, drawing special attention to the troublesome site offered by the Council, and discussing how its shortcomings impacted in the creation of the permanent collections. It also describes some of the creative solutions invented by the curator to overcome the problems, and the difficulties he came across in implementing them. **Section C** details the fate of the most promising of those solutions, the Joicey Museum, and its failure to become the ideal solution to the Laing's site issues.

A. NEWCASTLE IN THE LATE VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN AGES. THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE EARLY LAING

Between the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the First World War, Newcastle experienced remarkable growth and prosperity. The economic development generated by the rise of mining, shipbuilding and manufacturing industries brought quick changes to the city, which became 'a service and commercial centre for the surrounding industrial region.'[4] The rapid population growth, the creation of new suburbs and the recognition as a diocese (and therefore, as a city) in 1882, and as a county borough (with Gateshead, Tynemouth and South Shields) in 1888, besides the gradual improvement in health and social issues, completed a transformation which owed much to a 'highly successful local entrepreneurial elite.'[5] This elite not only had business interests but was also keen on science, culture and technological development for the city.[6]

[3] Faulkner, T.E. (1996). *Northumbrian Panorama. Studies in the History and Culture of North East England*. London: Octavian Press Limited, p.200.
[4] Lendrum, O. 'An Integrated Elite?' in R. Colls and B. Lancaster, eds. (2001) *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*. Chichester: Phillimore, p.27.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Purdue, A.W. (2011) *Newcastle, the Biography.* Stroud: Amberley, p.195.

Economy, society and politics

The picture *Iron and Coal* (1861), by William Bell Scott (1811-1890), makes a good graphic description of the connexion of late-Victorian Tyneside economy to the phenomenon of industrialism (fig. 1). The boom in railways and steamships around the middle of the nineteenth century produced a high demand for iron and coal. Tyneside iron industry was not competitive enough to face off the Teesside furnaces, so it declined quickly and faded before the end of the century. By contrast, coalfields were well-placed to supply the demand, and therefore production increased significantly: around a million people at the turn of the century were employed in the coal industry, and by 1913, the combined output of all the collieries in Northumberland and Durham represented almost one-fifth of the total production in the United Kingdom.[7] The economic importance of Tyneside during this period can be understood when thinking how 'Old King Coal' was vital for the British economy, as it fuelled transport, industrial ovens and steam-powered factory machines, and generated the gas and electricity which supplied domestic heating and lighting technologies. Together with this internal consumption, the growing demand from abroad contributed to the consolidation of coal as the basis of regional economy and gave miners the strength to build up effective trade unions.

Shipbuilding was another vital foundation for Tyneside's economy during this period, and was also key for the Laing's permanent collection, as many of the early donations to the gallery came from shipbuilders (see pp.270-296). The decisive construction of the first sea-going iron screw collier, the *John Bowes,* by Sir Charles Mark Palmer (1822-1907) in 1852 created a rapidly increasing demand for Tyne-built iron ships, which took advantage of the start of the Crimean War in 1854 and the consequent demand for armour-plated warships, fed also by other famous shipbuilders such as Charles W. Mitchell (1820-1895) and Charles Sheridan Swan (1831-1879).[8] Interlocked with shipbuilding, the importance of engineering grew, of which the firm Armstrong's, or the Charles Parsons' steam-turbine are the most outstanding examples.[9] In charge of Armstrong's company, there was Lord William

[7] Middlebrook, S. (1950). *Newcastle upon Tyne. Its Growth and Achievement*. Newcastle: Newcastle Chronicle and Journal.

[8] Mc Cord, N. (1979). *North-East England: an Economic and Social History*. London: Batsford Academy.

[9] Rowe, D. J. (1971). 'The Economy of the North-East in the Nineteenth Century: a Survey with a bibliography of works published since 1945', *Northern History*, vol 6.

Fig. 1. William Bell Scott, *In the Nineteenth Century the Northumbrians Show the World what Can Be Done with Iron and Coal* (1861.Oil on canvas. Wallington, Northumberland).

Armstrong of Cragside (1810-1900), shipbuilder, arms manufacturer, inventor, hydraulic engineer and the most important entrepreneur of the Tyneside region, whose innovations in weapons were hugely profitable during the arms race of the turn of the century and crucial for the First World War.[10] Armstrong's philanthropic donations and his impact on cultural life were as relevant for Newcastle as his industrial achievements: he gifted Jesmond Dene, Armstrong Birdge and Armstrong Park, was one of the main subscribers to the Newcastle College of Physical Science (then part of the University of Durham, and the heart of the future Newcastle University), and gave £11,500 towards the building of Hancock Museum of Natural History.[11] He also presided the Literary and Philosophical Society and the Mechanics' Institute, and his great-nephew and heir, William Watson-Armstrong (1863-1941), was amongst the founding members of the Laing Committee (see p.178).

Industrialisation radically altered the traditional manufacturing and demographic structures of the city and the region. Newcastle became 'the capital, the head office, the cultural centre, the playground and shopping mall for Tyneside' thus concentrating 'a much larger percentage of professionals than in any other town in the North East except for Durham.'[12] In contrast, the industrial growth produced a rural decline in Northumberland, with labourers leaving the farms to work in industry.[13] The population at the industrial areas of Tyneside grew from 87,784 in 1851 to 271,523 in 1914, the economic boom making Newcastle one of the fastest-growing cities in Britain, with skilled and unskilled workers coming from the North of England, Southern Scotland and Ireland.[14] The rapid growth led to housing problems, which affected the population groups very differently according to their living standards. Of course, there were few issues for the elite class of wealthy industrialists, or for the middle class, more abundant than anywhere in the North, for

[10] By 1900, Tyneside had become 'a world-famous centre for both shipbuilding and armaments', thus stimulating other industries such as electricity, glass and chemical production. See: Hepple, L.W. (1976). *A History of Northumberland and Newcastle upon Tyne*. London: Phillimore & Co, p.127.

[11] For a complete biography, see: Heald, H. (2010). *William Armstrong: Magician of the North*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Northumbria Press.

[12] Op. cit. note 6, p.196-197.

[13] For every job lost in agriculture in the nineteenth century, eight better-paid jobs in coal mining were created, thus meaning significant movements of people towards the city. See: Hunt, E.H. (12-1986). 'Industrialisation and Regional Inequality: Wages in Britain, 1760-1914' *Journal of Economic History*, xlvi, p.956.

[14] Barke, M. and Buswell, R. J. (1980). *Historical atlas of Newcastle upon Tyne*. Newcastle: Petras (Newcastle Polytechnic), p.133-166.

whom Newcastle became a centre for 'commerce and consumption'.[15] Instead, the large poorer classes, composed mainly of Irish and Scots immigrants, endured overcrowded and low quality housing conditions, bad quality of water and a poor diet, all of which led to frequent cholera epidemics and the worst death rates in the country.[16]

The economic boom also produced changes in the structure of the city, creating an industrial expansion along both river banks, a new commercial development at the old town, new housing for workers and a drift of the higher classes away from the Quayside, whose urbanization led to an impressive change in the river landscape.[17] The destruction of the west end of the Quayside during the fire of 1854, although dramatic, gave the opportunity to demolish slums and create new streets and build modern offices and public buildings in the old town, which was completed with shops, banks, churches, schools and hotels, continuing in this way with the rebuilding commissioned by Richard Grainger (1797–1861) to the fashionable neoclassical architect John Dobson (1787-1865) in early Victorian times. By 1900, the city already showed a clear separation between working and residential areas, but the process of reconstruction continued during the Edwardian era, focusing on eclectic and opulent commercial buildings constructed in Neoclassical and Gothic Revival styles and 'decorated with all sorts of pinnacles, domes and fancy trimmings borrowed from different countries and architectural ages.'[18] The Laing building is an example of this trend (see pp.35-40).

Nevertheless, the aim of 'progress' and economic growth also destroyed many historic buildings, such as the Mansion House, much of the town wall and the medieval chapel of St Thomas the Martyr, whilst the building of the High-Level Bridge damaged ancient buildings like the Castle, the Stank and Spital Towers and the Forth House.[19] The sacrifice of historical landmarks in the pursuit of modernisation continued during the twentieth century, causing concerns to the Laing's authorities (see pp.145-150). Bold political decisions happened partly as a

[15] Faulkner, T.E., 'Architecture in Newcastle', in Colls, R. and Lancaster, B., eds. (2001) *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*. Chichester: Phillimore.
[16] Op. cit. note 6, p.216.
[17] Op. cit. note 6, p.175.
[18] Bean, D. (1971). *Tyneside. A Biography.* London: Macmillan, p.105.
[19] Op. cit. note 6, p. 128.

consequence of the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, which transformed Newcastle's town government from 'a closed, self-selected, mainly Tory body' to a regulated assembly whose duties started to increase and whose electorate grew with the population rise and the more liberal franchise.[20] From that moment on, Newcastle gained notoriety as one of the foremost radical cities in the nineteenth century, in direct connection with the figure of Joseph Cowen Jr (1829-1900) and the influence of his newspapers, the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* and the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*.[21] Besides journalism, Cowen made a career as a radical politician, supported the Irish Home Rule movement and Hungarian and Italian nationalist movements, fought against poverty and poor living and housing conditions, and helped the development of the cooperative movement and trade unionism. After he resigned in 1886, the Liberal Party took control of the local government until the arrival of the Labour Representation Committee (later Labour Party) in Newcastle in 1901, which attracted most working-class votes and contributed to the creation of a more divisive class consciousness. By 1914 Newcastle had seven Labour Party councillors, six of them working men and one of them a merchant. This political composition had an impact upon the funding received by the Laing in its early years (see pp.184-188).

Rapid development, together with the progressive achievement of the five-and-a-half-day working week, also brought changes in leisure and culture. About 60 Gentlemen's Clubs were created, following the example of those in London and the Victorian trend of giving social and cultural life a privatized character.[22] During the weekends, public amusement places such as Gosforth Park and St James Park, and daytrips to Tynemouth and South Shields became very popular, whilst in the evenings, music halls, variety theatres and the first cinemas offered the experience of popular culture.[23] The Edwardian era also witnessed the arrival of female leisure time, thanks to the reduction in the number of births, the increased access to jobs and the creation of charitable events and sports clubs. Department stores like

[20] Calcott, M., in Colls, R. and Lancaster, B., eds. (2001) *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*. Chichester: Phillimore, p.71.
[21] Hugman, J., in Colls, R. and Lancaster, B., eds. (2001) Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History. Chichester: Phillimore, p.113-132.
[22] These included the Union Club, the Recorder's Club, the Liberal Club and the Constitutional Club. Op. cit. note 6, p.223.
[23] Atkins, E.M., in Faulkner, T.E. (1996). *Northumbrian Panorama. Studies in the History and Culture of North East England*. London: Octavian Press Limited, p.195-204.

Bainbridge's and Fenwick's also offered leisure experiences by opening cafes and by displaying artworks, antiquities and luxury objects.[24] Newcastle became the centre of entertainment for Tyneside, with people coming from all over the region to watch football, go shopping or attend theatre plays, but also to drink: by the turn of the century, the city counted one pub for every 307 people.[25] Although public control over alcohol consumption increased gradually, its production and trade remained a lucrative business, having a determining impact on the creation of the Laing Art Gallery, as it was the source of founder Alexander Laing's (1827-1905) richness and the profession of one of the Laing's earliest donors and Committee members, Henry Albert Higginbottom (1850-1930).

The arts scene

Newcastle's industrial character conditioned its aesthetic development. The tastes of the industrialist art patrons, together with a disordered development of artistic initiatives receiving insufficient public support, may have contributed to the delay in the creation of the city's first public art gallery. Macleod (1989) relates 'Newcastle's erratic history of support for the arts' with the business activity of shipbuilders like Armstrong or Mitchell and manufacturers like James Leathart (1820-1895) or Sir Isaac Lowthian Bell (1816-1904).[26] She argues that engagement towards arts only took place after the North East had achieved prosperity, because those who were destined to become the new patrons had hitherto been too busy building their own businesses and achieving the fortunes which would enable them, later on, to invest in the cultural development of their community:

> the captains of the new industries, self-made men, invested their wealth in the purchase of works by the leading artists of the day; the aristocratic patron was replaced by a mercantile one and the rewards of economic success were channelled into the activities of private patronage and public philanthropy […] These new patrons, however, also contributed to public art exhibitions and provided funds for the establishment of free libraries, Mechanic's Institutes, schools, hospitals, churches and parks; […]

[24] Op. cit. note 6, p.210.
[25] Bennison, B., in Colls, R. and Lancaster, B., eds. (2001) *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*. Chichester: Phillimore, p167-192.
[26] Macleod, D. (1989). 'Private and Public Patronage in Victorian Newcastle.' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 52*, 188-208. doi:10.2307/751544, p.188.

> shaping not only the economy but also the social and political character of the region.[27]

Due to the relatively small size of the city, this elite of industrialists, merchants and financiers who had been responsible for the industrial economic growth were often closely related not only because of their common entrepreneurial interests, but also because of a considerable amount of intermarriage between their families and 'a matrix of connections: school, church, chapel, the reserve forces, and the membership of clubs and societies, such as the Northern Counties or the Union Clubs and the Literary and Philosophical Society.'[28] This interconnection had a determining weight in the creation and early history of the Laing.

The cultural influence of industrialists like Mitchell and Armstrong is divided into two different periods: during the 1860s and 1870s, their 'philanthropy' was devoted to the creation of educational resources for their employees (such as the Mechanics' Institutes) whilst since the 1880s, when their industrial affairs were already secured, both of them shifted their interests towards art, started collecting pictures and created private galleries at their own houses: Cragside for Armstrong in 1883 and Jesmond Towers for Mitchell in 1885. Also, in this later period, both donated funds for cultural institutions: Armstrong to the Hancock Museum and Mitchell to Aberdeen University. The latter also gave funds to the Newcastle Arts Association between 1878 and 1882, although his main interest was not supporting the fine arts generally but rather specifically his son, the artist Charles W Mitchell Jr (1854-1903).[29] Probably for reasons of social prestige - as owning art 'was considered a necessary part of the cultural makeup of the successful man' –other local industrialists followed the trend, and some of them became influential collectors playing a key role in the development of avant-garde movements.[30] This was the case of Leathart (who became Secretary of the Newcastle School of Art and was one of the most important patrons of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement) but also of the urban utilities owner George E. Henderson (1844-1937) and the solicitor J.A.D. Shipley (1822-1909),

[27] Macleod, D. (1989). 'Avant-garde patronage in the North East'. *Pre-Raphaelites: Painters and Patrons in the North-East.* Exhibition catalogue. Newcastle: Laing Art Gallery, p.8.
[28] Op. cit. note 6, p.189-195.
[29] For details on Mitchell Jr's connection to the Laing, see pp.283-285.
[30] Op. cit. note 27, p.25.

whose large art collections had - although for different reasons – a key impact in the early history of the Laing (see pp.270-291).

These private art collections tended to mix avant-garde acquisitions with traditional works and local subjects. Scholars have found different causes for these mixed tastes: for Purdue (2011), they were a consequence of the collectors' middle-class origin, together with an insecurity over their own artistic education. The private character of Victorian society would explain why local elites limited their intellectual and cultural life to their own homes, private societies and subscription funded institutions.[31] For Atkins (1996), instead, local patrons' preference towards mainstream academic art was aimed to consolidate their social status through the association 'with recognized standards of excellence and superiority'.[32] Macleod (1989) disagrees with both by highlighting the modern taste of local elites, in the idea that 'Newcastle's leading commercial men had successfully engineered a technological revolution by their willingness to challenge existing rules. By extension, when it came to buying art, they appreciated pictures that looked inventive, regardless of their label'.[33]

Regarding arts organisations, the Victorian economic prosperity brought a diversification of spaces, with pre-existing institutions being complemented by the rapid birth of a series of associations, some led by artists, others by the same network of elite entrepreneurs who already dominated the whole panorama of official culture in the city, thus producing an interconnection between similar institutions often controlled by the same people. A closer look at these institutions reveals strengths, deficiencies and a gap that only a public art gallery could cover.

The earliest cultural institution in Newcastle was the Literary and Philosophical Society (1793). Described as the 'forum of the New Northumbrians', it held the membership of the most renowned Newcastle elites and was the crucial meeting point of the county and urban elites, all of them united by their enthusiasm for Tyneside's economic progress and pride in its human and natural history, which however this 'progress' was destroying. [34] The so-called 'Lit and Phil' played a crucial

[31] Op. cit. note 6, p.236.
[32] Op. cit. note 23, p.202.
[33] Op. cit. note 27, p.12.
[34] Some of the Lit and Phil's presidents or vice-presidents were the engineer Robert Stephenson (1803-1859), Armstrong, the retailer John Fenwick (1846-1905), and the inventor Joseph W. Swan (1828-1914), who presented the first light bulb in history

role in the Laing's early years, as many of the gallery's committee members were connected to it (see p.178). However, despite its cultural relevance, the institution cannot be considered as a direct predecessor of a public art gallery, firstly because exhibitions were not in its events programme, and secondly, because, as a private institution, its activities benefited mostly its members, and not the wider society.

Closely connected with the Lit and Phil through many of its 68 founding members, the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries started its work of promotion and conservation of the region's historic past in 1813, as the oldest provincial antiquarian society in England.[35] Although mainly focused on archaeology (particularly of Hadrian's Wall), the society was also interested in prehistoric and medieval periods and industrial archaeology, and it collected archaeological artefacts and up to 30,000 books. In 1847 they became guardians of the Castle Keep and Garth after a successful campaign to save the buildings from the demolition scheduled to allow the development of the railways. Then, in 1883, the Society leased the Black Gate from the Council to display its collection, thus preceding the Laing as the first exhibition space for local history in Newcastle. However, persistent concerns about the conservation conditions of the artefacts at the Black Gate, meant that many of Society of Antiquaries' members - who also formed part of the Laing Committee – hoped that the collection could be moved to the Laing once it had opened (see section pp.40-51).

The first local cultural institution with an almost universal access was the Mechanics' Institute, opened in 1824. Because of the buoyant economic growth and the industrialists' paternalism, Newcastle was the third city in Britain - after Manchester and Liverpool - to provide its workforce with a democratic cultural programme featuring lessons, lectures, concerts, exhibitions of art and curiosities, and access to a library.[36] Major industrial figures, such as Lowthian Bell, Armstrong, the engineer and factory owner Robert Stirling Newall (1812-1889), the shipping magnate and Liberal politician Thomas Eustace Smith (1831-1903) and the alkali manufacturer

to the 'Lit and Phil' in 1878. The Society's reputation attracted lecturers from all over Britain, such as Oscar Wilde, Sir William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin), and the author and critic Andrew Lang. See: Colls, R. (2007). *Northumbria. History and Identity. 547-2000.* Chichester: Phillimore & Co, p.151.

[35] Breeze, D., ed. (2013). *200 Years: the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne 1813-2013.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne.

[36] For the wider context, see Walker, M. (2016). *The Development of the Mechanics' Institute Movement in Britain and Beyond*. London: Routledge.

Alexander Stevenson (n.d.) collaborated to raise money for the building of the Mechanics' Institute to the new quarters in New Bridge Street. One of the fundraising strategies was an exhibition combining conventional and modern artworks loaned by the institution's patrons, which was badly received by local press.[37] But despite the criticisms, fundraising was successful, and the impressive new premises opened in 1866, including six large classrooms, a library, a lecture room, a newsroom and a 'smoke room', but not a purpose-built exhibition space, something which is again symptomatic of the local patrons' ambiguous attitude towards visual arts. Moreover, the institution itself was short-lived: by 1878, its land, books and educational operations were transferred to Newcastle Council, which amalgamated them into the new Public Library.

Indeed, the first local initiative strictly related to visual arts had to be developed by artists. The Northumberland Institution for the Promotion of the Fine Arts, later Northern Academy of Arts is - despite its short-lasting existence (1822-1832) - relevant both for being the first artists' society in Newcastle, and because it was the means used by the local painter T.M. Richardson Sr (1784–1848) for his crucial promotion of art in Victorian Newcastle. Richardson's original plan when creating the Institution at his own home in Brunswick Place was mainly furthering his career by bringing him sales and commissions. Although his first idea was to exhibit his own work, he started inviting contributors after realizing he did not have enough pictures to fill the place.[38] To give his 'Institute' the look of a public organisation, Richardson created a committee including members from the local elite, intellectuals and semi-professional artists. Richardson's strategy of getting support from the middle-class elite by choosing the same members that already administered the Society of Antiquaries or the Lit and Phil was not very different from that adopted for the constitution of the Laing Committee seventy years later (see p.178). However, Richardson's Institution did not manage to gain support either by its committee

[37] The loans offered by the industrialists for the Fine Art and Mechanical Invention Exhibition of 1866 had a preponderance of modern works - such as Leathart's Pre-Raphaelite collection –, perceived by Newcastle's society as too innovative or avant-gardist, and therefore, contrary to the spirit of 'radical liberalism' and its values of sobriety, inventiveness and thrift. Local newspapers like the Newcastle Chronicle - which used to issue prints of paintings by the local artist Ralph Hedley, thus promoting a more regionalist vision of art - mocked the paintings in Leathart's collection, evidencing the aesthetical distance between the small group of wealthy elites and the rest of the population. Op. cit. note 23, p.203.

[38] Usherwood, P. & Bowden, K. (1984). *Art for Newcastle. Thomas Miles Richardson and the Newcastle Exhibitions 1822-1843*. Exhibition catalogue. Newcastle: Tyne and Wear County Council Museums, p.11.

members or the public administration, which according to Usherwood (1984) was due to being perceived as a private enterprise masquerading as a public institution.[39]

After the Committee's attempt to exclude Richardson from his own Institution in 1823, he and Parker started the Northern Academy of Arts, run this time without a committee. This was Newcastle's first purpose-built gallery, commissioned by Richardson to John Dobson. The extraordinary cost of the imposing building could not be covered with the gallery's insufficient sales, after major artists rejected to offer their work for exhibition. Moreover, public objections continued because of the preponderance of London exhibitors instead of local artists, and so did accusations against the involvement of private speculators. The institution was dissolved in 1832, with debts amounting to £1,700, a detail that recalls the Laing's financial problems fifty years later (see pp.184-188).[40]

The Northern Academy of Arts was replaced by The Friends of the Arts and the Newcastle Institution for the General Promotion of Fine Arts (1832-1843). Created 'by a group of prosperous professional men, the town's "intelligentsia" who participated in every scientific, educational and charitable enterprise of the time', and believed in art exhibitions as instruments of public instruction and improvement, it offered free admission for the working-class public. [41] However, it soon faced the same financial problems as the Northern Academy of Arts, thus proving that public support was crucial to guarantee art galleries an independence from the market and the stability to achieve their educational purposes. In 1839, the project was replaced by the North of England Society for the Promotion of Fine Arts, which focused on art education by setting up lessons for the skilled working-class.[42] Although financial problems continued and the initiative was even shorter-lasting than its predecessors, it started paving the road for the School of Design, which opened in 1844 as the first public investment in visual arts in Newcastle. According to its master, William Bell Scott, the school succeeded only partially, as most of the students were not

[39] Ibid, p.21.
[40] Ibid, p.25.
[41] Ibid, p.19.
[42] Ibid, p.26.

designers or draughtsmen for local industry, but mainly governesses or unemployed women more interested in art than in design.[43]

Thirty years later, the businessman and councillor TP Barkas (1819-1891) and his partner TH Tweedy (n.d.) opened the next private art gallery in the city, the Central Exchange Gallery (1870-1897)**.** The place successfully worked as a mixture of gallery and club, offering photographic and art exhibitions (including an exhibition of local art in 1889 which was patronized by the British Association), lectures, costume shows, painting-against-the-clock competitions, band performances and even spiritualist sessions, thus combining the role of a civic gallery with more populist forms of entertainment, all with an affordable sixpence entrance. The venue's versatility, together with Barkas' political influence, allowed the long survival of the project (which continued, under the management of Barkas' son, until the end of the lease in 1897), and perhaps contributed to the delay in the creation of a public art gallery. Indeed, and despite its false municipal status, the Central Exchange Gallery was mentioned in Council minutes as the city's representative gallery, and the local artist Thomas Dickinson (b.1855) expressed his desire that the Central Exchange Gallery would 'fill the position of a Municipal Gallery, as it already was conducted similarly to other Art Galleries of the country, holding three or four exhibitions each year'.[44] Nevertheless, its focus on entertainment distanced Barkas' project from purely artistic activities, and its contemporaries recognised that the place 'added a pleasure to life, though it may not greatly have advanced the public appreciation of art', thus acknowledging that it never fulfilled the educational role expected from a public institution.[45]

In 1877, Elswick Hall (formerly Richard Grainger's house), opened to show the public collection of 160 original models of sculptures by John Graham Lough (1789-1876) and 100 sculptures by Matthew Noble (1817-1876) in what was the first attempt of a public art gallery. The Council's decision had its origins in an agreement with Lough's widow, who had donated the models to the city on condition that suitable

[43] Usherwood, P., 'Art on the Margins: from Bewick to Baltic', in Colls, R. and Lancaster, B., eds. (2001) *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*. Chichester: Phillimore, p.253-254.
[44] Op. cit. note 23, p.218.
[45] Watson, A. (23-03-1922). 'Recollections of men and events on Tyneside'. *Shields Gazette,* n.p.

accommodation would be provided.[46] The Conservative Alderman and businessman Sir William Haswell Stephenson (1836-1918) offered the site, but the inadequacy of the premises was a source of embarrassment for the Council, whose minutes collect discussions about the damages produced to the sculptures by the visitors.[47] The concern about the Lough models continued over the following years, and probably had an impact on the original plans (1880) for the new Public Library, which featured three rooms in the first floor labelled as 'Sculpture and Art Gallery' (fig. 2).

The intention to use the upper floor of the Public Library as the city's art gallery was confirmed by Cowen's opening discourse:

> Still literature, although the chief, is not the only public educator. Art now justly plays a part in that work, and art has not to be neglected in the new institution. (…) I rejoice, therefore, that alongside the library will be found accommodation for an art gallery in the spacious and well-lighted room in the new building where there will be provided ample wall space for pictures, and floor space for statuary.[48]

However, when this speech was pronounced, the construction works had not yet started. New needs emerged later, and the Library Committee transformed the first floor into a reference room, although its Chairman, Alderman Henry William Newton (1842-1914), expressed his hope that the Lough sculptures presented to the library by the sculptor's chief patron, the Northumberland MP Sir Matthew White Ridley (1842-1904) - would one day 'form the nucleus for our art gallery.'[49] Elswick Hall was again connected to the Laing's genesis through Mayor George Harkus' (d.1915) attempt to establish a picture gallery in the attics above the Lough sculptures, a proposal which was suspended because of a – probably prearranged - petition with over 700 signatures demanding a public meeting on the question of an art gallery (see p.78).[50] The Lough statues from the Library were ultimately transferred to the Laing's entrance hall when the gallery opened, although they soon became

[46] Reed, A. (1903) *Bruce's School*, p.136, quoted in Johnson, M. (2009) *Architectural taste and patronage in Newcastle upon Tyne, 1870-1914* (Doctoral thesis, Northumbria University, Newcastle, U.K.), p.385. Retrieved from http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/2867.

[47] NCR 03-08-1881, p.351. L352-N536 (1). NCL. Stephenson, ex-Mayor and magistrate of Newcastle, would later become Chairman of the Public Libraries Committee. He was probably one of the people giving A. Laing the idea of donating an art gallery.

[48] Anon (16-08-1880). 'The Newcastle Public Library'. *Newcastle Daily Journal*, p.3f-g.

[49] NCR 07-12-1881, p.72. L352-N536 (1). NCL.

[50] NCR 11-10-1899 p.755. L352-N536 (1). NCL.

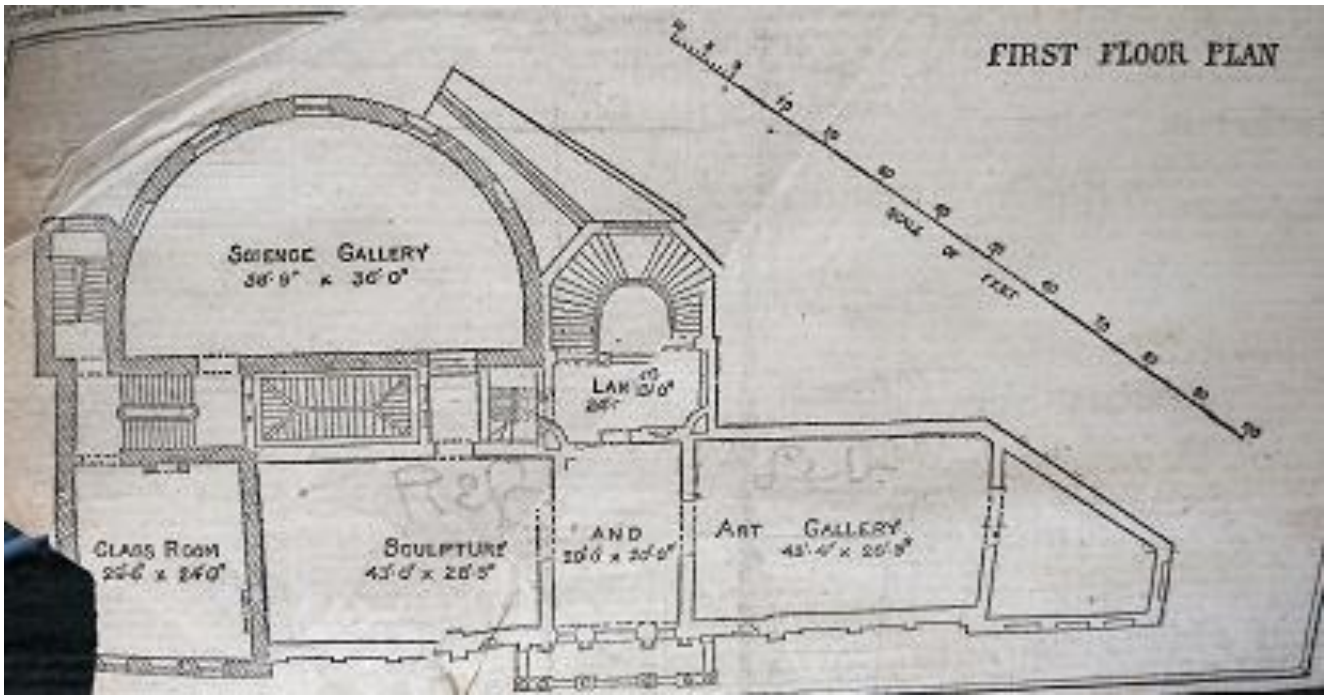

Fig. 2. Plan of the future Public Library. *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 16-08-1880.

unfashionable, and by 1915, the Committee decided to get rid of them.[51] After an unsuccessful attempt to return them to the Library, they were finally moved to Elswick Hall in 1916.[52]

While the first steps for the creation of the Public Library were taking place, Mitchell started patronising another initiative founded by art collectors and enthusiasts. It was the Arts Association, which in its short life (1878-1882) held seven exhibitions. As happened with previous art initiatives in Victorian Newcastle, its existence was determined by the sponsorship of the industrialist elite who provided cultural leadership for the community: Armstrong was its President, while Stevenson, Leathart, Lowthian Bell, the chemical manufacturer Jacob Burnett (n.d.), and the shipowner James Hall (1826-1904) were some of the committee members whose art loans made the exhibitions possible. Also, as in previous experiences, audiences had difficulties connecting with the patrons' tastes. Once again, the Association faced low attendance and financial failure, besides the charges of snobbery by the local press, which considered its soirées and events a manifestation of elitism and an imposition of upmarket art values.[53]

The Arts Association was succeeded by an artist-run initiative, the Bewick Club (1883), whose membership was instead based on artistic, rather than elite status.[54] It had been created by Dickinson and artists from the Newcastle Life School (founded in 1878), and - although some of its patrons were former supporters of the Arts Association - , its main aim was helping professional local artists, 'in self-conscious reaction to the Arts Association', whose exhibitions 'had dedicated little space to their work'.[55] Its first two Presidents, the artists W.H. Emmerson (1831-1895) and Ralph Hedley (1848-1913) took important steps for the valorisation of the profession at a local level, such as the creation of an Art Union, the campaigning in support of a public art gallery in Newcastle, and the organisation of very successful annual exhibitions displaying local scenes and the work of local artists, which however suffered the attack of the *Newcastle Daily Leader* because of its 'inferior and

[51] LCM, 28-05-1915. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.100
[52] LCM, 31-03-1916. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.135.
[53] Op. cit. note 26, p.204.
[54] Mumba, R. (2008) *Class, nation and localism in the Northumberland art world, 1820-1939.* (Doctoral thesis, Durham University, Durham, U.K.), p139. Retrieved from http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2243/
[55] Ibid, p.142.

unrepresentative character'.[56] The introduction of an ingredient of local pride was the main achievement of the Bewick Club, which would influence both the polemics regarding the appointment of CBS as the Laing's curator and the local character of the gallery's exhibitions (see pp.160-163 and pp.239-270). However, and similarly to precedent initiatives, the Club failed to obtain municipal sponsorship, the proposal being rejected by the Council (perhaps due to TP Barkas' influence) in 1885.[57]

Similar to the Bewick Club in its local emphasis (80% of its artist members lived in Newcastle, and 13% in Gateshead) and sharing the desire to create a public art gallery was the Pen and Palette Club, founded in 1900 for 'men with an interest in the arts, literature, science and journalism.'[58] Despite having Mitchell Jr as a President and Dickinson as a Secretary, the Pen and Palette had a greater connection to the local cultural elite, including members like Mitchell Sr, and also the businessman Richard Oliver Heslop (1842-1916) and the banker Thomas Hodgkin (1831-1913), who were later appointed as members of the Laing Committee. Another local businessman connected to the club was the wine merchant and city councillor Farquhar Milne Laing (1841-1917), Alexander Laing's younger brother. In 1890, Farquhar had unsuccessfully tried to lease from the Council the Butcher and the old Vegetable markets, which he wanted to convert into a large public hall with capacity for 10,000 people and a 700-foot art gallery.[59] Although the proposal was rejected to avoid the destruction of the market, concealed reasons may have been Barkas' pressure, or the hope - very active within some Council members - of having an art gallery in the piece of land attached to the Public Library which was about to be bought.[60] In any case, Farquhar's wish to have his own art gallery remained, and was perhaps intensified after the construction works of the Laing Art Gallery started in 1901, because one year later, he founded the restoration of T.M. Richardson's Academy of Arts, to where the Pen and Palette Club moved. There, besides holding a few exhibitions in the months before the opening of the Laing, the club members

[56] Op. cit. note 23.
[57] Millard, J. (1992). *A Romance with the North East: Robert and Isa Jobling.* Exhibition Catalogue. Newcastle: Tyne and Wear Museums, p.32.
[58] Sinton, A. (2001). *The Pen and Palette Club. A history, 1900-2000*. Newcastle: The Pen and Palette Club.
[59] NCR 17-11-1890, p.33. L352-N536 (1). NCL.
[60] NCR 04-03-1891, p.225. L352-N536 (1). NCL.

discussed about the ideal aims and management of the future public art gallery, in what seems to imply a competition between both brothers (see pp.76-79).[61]

The late opening of the Laing

The previous paragraphs have shown the overlap of private initiatives arisen before the opening of the Laing. Some of these initiatives aimed to be profitable, whilst others had philanthropic aims, but both had a negative impact on Newcastle's public investment in arts: in the first case, because of the pressure exerted by businessmen against the creation of public facilities that would reduce their private profits, and in the second case, because the Council considered it unnecessary to provide a cultural service already offered privately.[62] Instead, it focused investment on the pressing needs caused by the accelerated urban growth, while trying to manage the distrust in politicians and the complaints against rate-paying arisen after cases of corruption occurred between 1850 and 1900. These reasons underpinned the Council's decision not to provide the Laing with any initial grant, thus starting the story of financial issues conditioning the gallery's management since its origins. And, ultimately, they contributed to delay its opening: although by the turn of the century Newcastle was the tenth most populated provincial city in England, most art galleries in big industrial settlements, and some in smaller cities, were earlier than the Laing (fig. 3).

As the chart evidences, the creation and distribution of regional galleries in Britain was irregular and had little regard for population sizes. The situation, which persisted during the twentieth century, being denounced in the Miers Report, was related to the fact that museums were not perceived as a necessary service, but rather as a status symbol for cities.[63] Nevertheless, the embarrassment of being 'late' in art matters in comparison to cities of similar importance was what ultimately mobilized Newcastle politicians and cultural elites towards the creation of an art gallery.

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[61] Pen and Palette Club (Newcastle upon Tyne, England) papers (1901-1903). Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society, Tracts vol.399, no.17, pp.86-88.
[62] Op. cit. note 23, p.215.
[63] Miers, H. (1928). *A Report on the Public Museums of the British Isles (other than the National Museums) to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees.* Edinburgh: T&A Constable, Ltd, p.14.

OPENING YEAR	GALLERY	POPULATION ACCORDING TO THE 1901 CENSUS
1828	Scottish National Gallery (Edinburgh)	488,796
1849	New Walk Museum and Art Gallery (Leicester)	211,574
1851	Brighton	123,478
1875	Nottingham Castle Museum	239,753
1877	Walker Art Gallery (Liverpool)	684,947
1882	Manchester Art Gallery	543,969
1883	Aberdeen	304,439
1885	Birmingham	543,969
1888	Leeds	428,953
1890	Belfast	386,947
1892	York	77,793
1899	Beaney House of Art and Knowledge (Canterbury)	51,379
1900	Victoria Art Gallery (Bath)	101,778
1901	Kelvingrove Art Gallery (Glasgow)	571,615
1904	Cartwright Hall Art Gallery (Bradford)	279,809
1904	**Laing Art Gallery (Newcastle)**	**214,803**
1905	Bristol	328,842
1905	National Museum of Wales (Cardiff)	164,420
1921	Hull	240,618
1932	Graves Art Gallery (Sheffield)	380,717
1939	Southampton	104,911

Fig. 3. The main provincial galleries in Britain listed according to their opening year. The cities which surpassed Newcastle in population in the 1901 census have been highlighted in green. Source: Visions of Britain (http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/EW1901PRE/2.).

Coinciding with the turn of the century, a feeling of 'civic pride' started to arise in the discourses of liberal politicians such as Harkus, who acknowledged that the Council was conscious of the lack of an art gallery 'like the ones in Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Derby, Dundee or Perth', and who recognised that, for this reason, Newcastle was losing valuable works of art which otherwise would have been given to the city, 'like the collection of the late Mr. John Hall'.[64] Alexander Laing alluded to the idea of Newcastle's lateness in the letter through which he offered the gift of an art gallery to Newcastle, where he declared himself 'impressed with the fact that a city like ours does not possess an Art Gallery, such as to be found in almost every other town of importance in England.'[65] By the time the Laing opened its doors, the conviction that the city had not previously been doing enough for the art education of its population was already widespread, as expressed by *The Studio:*

> Newcastle has at last awakened from its long and peaceful sleep of indifference to all matters relating to art, and finds itself in possession of a Public Art Gallery. The art of the town, so far as it is possible to promote art work through exhibitions, has been for many years past, dependent upon the exertions of the members of one or two small societies. These societies have done good work, but they cannot pretend to accomplish the art training that is needed in so large and populous district as Tyneside.[66]

Neither the Council's disinclination towards arts patronage nor the public perceptions of embarrassment on the matter disappeared after the opening of the gallery. Over thirty years later, the 'very apparent lack of interest in things artistic' was still regretted, as well as the 'lack of dignity' that had made Newcastle wait 'for some kind old gentleman to die and give them an art gallery.'[67]

Alexander Laing

The allusion to the Laing's donor in the text above brings up a reflection about the glorification of philanthropists inherent to privately founded municipal art galleries. The aim of immortality succeeded in the Laing, which is still named after its founder

[64] Anon (13-10-1899). 'Projected Art Gallery in Newcastle'. *Evening Chronicle,* p.4a.
[65] Laing, A. (17-01-1900). Letter to the Newcastle Council. NCR 1899-1900, p.153. L352-N536 (1). NCL.
[66] Anon (10-1904). *The Studio Magazine*, p.159.
[67] Spencer, J.R. (1937). *The Northern Pageant.* Newcastle: Newcastle Chronicle, p.193.

and displays two busts of him.[68] Still, this Scottish wine merchant working in Newcastle since 1849 had not had any previous acquaintance with art. As described by his contemporaries:

> Nobody thought of Mr Alexander Laing in connection to art in those days. He was, in fact, not suspected of having any tastes running in that direction. […] I never heard him say anything on the subject of pictures, or even so much as slightly indicate his intention of presenting to the town so magnificent a gift as the Laing Art Gallery.[69]

At the time, this unexpected donation was justified both as a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Laing's successful career in Newcastle, and as a gesture of public-spiritedness by 'a businessman who wished to make some return to the city he had made his home, and in which he had created his fortune.'[70] Despite the seriousness of alcohol-related problems in Newcastle, no criticisms seem to have arisen because of the source of Laing's money, unlike the protests against brewers founding the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, the Mappin Art Gallery in Sheffield and the Derby Art Gallery, all of which shared with the Laing a common attempt to enhance their donors' respectability 'at a time when alcohol was seen as a social menace.'[71]

However, unlike J.N. Mappin (1800-1883), Laing was not an art collector, and unlike A.B. Walker (1824-1893), he did not provide his gallery with a purchasing fund, nor did he live long enough to dictate its policy. Unlike Derby, Newcastle did not possess a previous art collection to be displayed in its new public museum. And unlike what happened in most British municipal galleries, none of the local patrons 'with respectable businesses' and involved in the several cultural initiatives taking place in Newcastle in this period contributed to the endowment of the Laing with either pecuniary donations nor artworks. Despite Mr Laing's hope that 'by the liberality of the inhabitants it [the gallery] would soon be supplied with pictures and statuary for the encouragement and development of British art', the donor's low social status probably had some connection with the paucity of donors coming forward (see

[68] For a discussion on the implications of donor memorials, see: Duncan, C. (1995). *Civilizing Rituals: inside public art museums*. London: Routledge, pp.72-101.
[69] Watson, A. (23-03-1922). 'The Folks O'Shields and Some Others. Recollections of men and events on Tyneside.' *Shields Gazette*, n.p.
[70] Stevenson, C.B. (1954). Report for the Laing Jubilee exhibition. TWA, T.132-6, n.p.
[71] Waterfield, G. (2015). *The People's Galleries. Art, Museums and exhibitions in Britain, 1800-1914.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p.258.

pp.212-233).[72] These new collectors also tended to see their artworks as investments, in-kind capital with a potential to increase in value in the future. This would explain why the artworks purchased by Newcastle industrialists and manufacturers in late-Victorian times were only donated to the Laing by their descendants, mostly after the Second World War, when the market prices of such works were at their lowest (see pp.270-296). This particularly slow arrival of donations makes the Laing collection a complex collective creation. Whilst as an art museum it is part of a global European bourgeois cultural phenomenon, the shared tastes of its Newcastle patrons - compensating for the founder's lack of collecting habits - root the gallery deeply into the culture of North-east England.

B. THE LAING AS A VENUE

As an integral component of a specific urban, social and cultural ecosystem, the Laing's creation was closely linked to its time and place.[73] This section describes the link between the gallery's early years and Newcastle's local idiosyncrasies, which determined not only the gallery's acquisitions and temporary exhibitions, but even the building's physical appearance, as the drawbacks of the location chosen by the Council conditioned the building of the Laing, limited its development and impacted on the creation of the permanent collection.

The site

The origin of the Laing's awkward site dates to 1891, when the Council purchased the piece of land lying immediately outside the north-eastern corner of the medieval defences of Newcastle, at the back of the City Library and intended to host a potential enlargement of this institution (fig. 4). Already at that early moment, Alderman Stephenson proposed to use this land for an art gallery, an idea that was

[72] NCR 07-02-1900, p.153. L352-N536 (1). NCL.
[73] For a wider discussion on the idea of museums ecosystems, see Jung, Y. (2011) 'The art museum ecosystem: a new alternative model.' *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 26:4, 321-338, DOI: 10.1080/09647775.2011.603927.

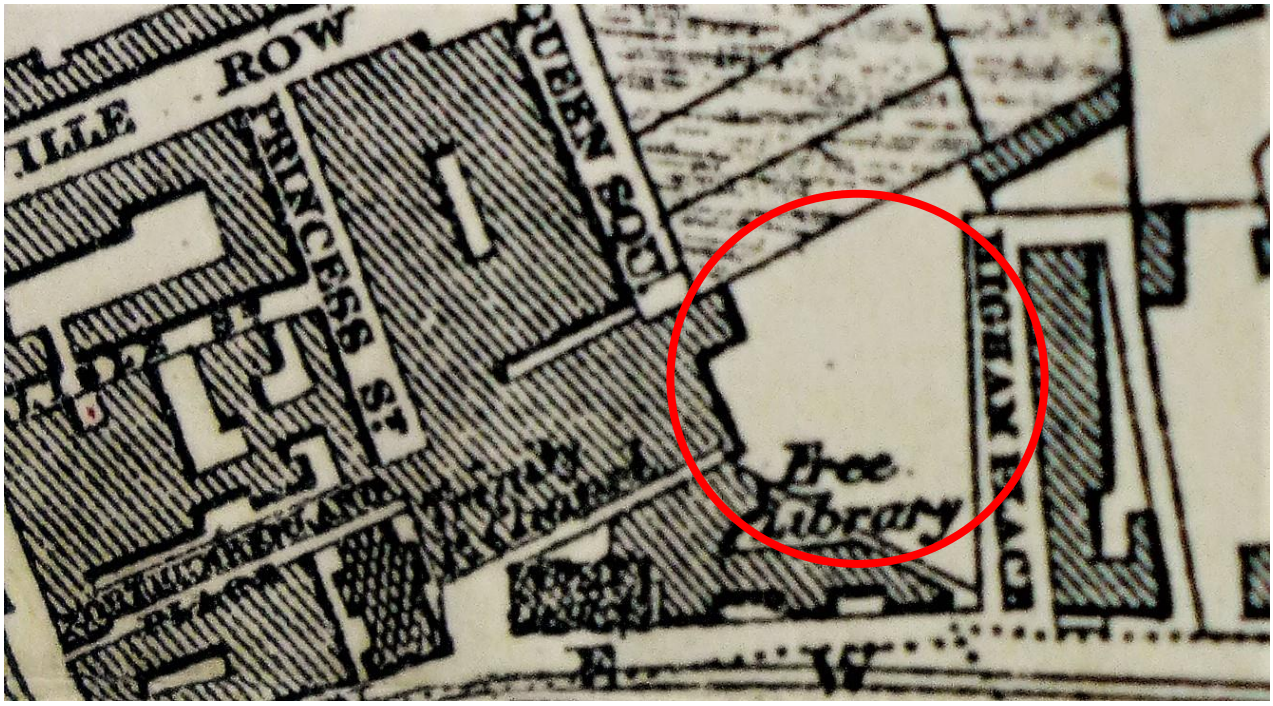


Fig. 4. The site in Higham Place after its purchase for the potential library enlargement. Reid's New Plan of Newcastle and Gateshead, 1892.

discarded due to the difficulty of obtaining the estimated amount of £14,000 required to build it.[74] Ten years later, Alexander Laing proposed that the Council host his gift at 'the site in Higham Place and New Bridge Street adjoining the Free Library'.[75] Although the proposal included a plan by the fashionable architects Cackett and Burns Dick, the Council members were reluctant about releasing the site, which Alderman Newton described as 'a side street leading to no place.'[76] Only the ex-Mayor George Harkus considered the location adequate - thus suggesting his intermediation in Laing's offer – so discussions on the matter continued.

However, the context of financial and commercial boom experienced by Newcastle at the turn of the century had increased the land prices and the property speculation in the city centre, complicating the search for alternative sites. The option of placing the gallery at the Vegetable Market had just been discarded when news arrived of Mr. Laing's uncertain health, so the Public Libraries Committee was pressured to release their site in Higham Place, for fear that the donor would die before his gift to the city was resolved. In exchange, the Council agreed to purchase another piece of land in the upper part of the same street to be used for a potential enlargement of the Library.[77] As Atkins (1996) points out, the gallery's subsidiary position, round the corner from the Library, with its back to the town centre, a complicated access route and a congested and unwelcoming entrance suggests that 'the general desire for an art gallery was less than wholehearted'.[78] However, as explained below, the site's implications went far beyond the symbolical level, truly conditioning the gallery's functionality and the growth of the permanent collection.

The building

As scheduled, the architects in charge of the Laing's plans were James Thoburn Cackett (1860-1928) and Robert Burns Dick (1868-1954). Cackett was a member of the Northern Architectural Association and was well known as a land surveyor. Before starting the partnership with Burns Dick, he had already designed many

[74] NCR 06-05-1891, p.388. L352-N536 (1). NCL.
[75] NCR 07-02-1900, p.153. L352-N536 (1). NCL.
[76] Ibid.
[77] NCR 02-05-1900, p.428. L352-N536 (1). NCL.
[78] Op. cit. note 23, p.207

distinctive offices and commercial buildings in the area known as Grainger Town, such as the Northern Goldsmiths in Blackett Street (1890) and the County Hotel restaurant in Grainger Street (1895).[79] Burns Dick's previous partnership (1895-1897) with C.T. Marshall (1866-1940), had led to the creation of buildings like the Trinity Presbyterian Church of Newcastle (Northumberland Road, 1895) and the Corporation Lodging House in Aberdeen (1896). On his own, he designed the Berwick Police Station (1898-1901) and undertook projects of urban improvement which establish a sort of continuity with John Dobson's work.[80]

Cackett and Burns Dick associated into a partnership in 1899, the Laing being one of their first joint projects. Together, they were extraordinarily productive: before the beginning of the First World War, they had already designed some of the city's most iconic commercial and public buildings of the period, like the Newcastle branch of Barclay's Bank (1903), the iconic Spanish City of Whitley Bay (1908-10), and the warehouses for R. Sinclair and Co (1913).[81] Especially remarkable for their stylistic connection with the Laing are the Bridge Hotel (1901) and the Cross House (1911-13), which share with the art gallery luxurious and extravagant Edwardian Baroque features.

Most Victorian art galleries had been built in a classical manner, thus suggesting an idea of 'temples of culture', but by the turn of the century the style was already out of fashion. According to Service (1977), the 'Free Baroque' was the logical heir of the classical manner.[82] Whilst the Councils of many cities building their museums in Edwardian times chose this style because it helped to create a luxurious background which suited the secondary use of galleries as settings for civic receptions, in the Laing's case it is likely that site-related reasons underpinned the decision.[83] Firstly, the Edwardian Baroque's exaggerated classicism helped to suggest prestige and to give a more imposing look which compensated for the Laing's awkward location. Indeed, only the theatrical effect of the architectonic and sculptural decoration, the elevated tower and the variations in the stone masses could balance the setbacks of

[79] Felstead, A. et al. (1993) *RIBA Directory of British Architects, 1834-1900*. London: Mansell, p.148.
[80] Anon. (January 1955). Obituary. *RIBA Journal*, vol.62, p131.
[81] Pearson, L.F. (1996) *Northern City: An Architectural History of Newcastle upon Tyne*. Newcastle: Newcastle City Libraries, pp.68 and 69.
[82] Service, A. (1977). *Edwardian architecture. A Handbook to Building Design in Britain 1890-1914*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., p.60.
[83] Op. cit. note 71, p.165.

the site's reduced size, with its entrance turning its back on the city centre. Secondly, the building needed to keep some visual connection with the Classical features of the pre-existing Public Library, as both institutions shared the same block. This was achieved by emphasizing the Laing's ground floor with the same rusticated plinth that featured on the façade of the Library, by matching the height of both buildings, and by keeping the alternating sequence of curved and straight pediments on the windows and on the tower's lantern (fig. 5). Last, it is quite likely that the main source of inspiration for Cackett and Burns Dick's busy firm were contemporary architectural journals, which by the turn of the century were publishing plans of the several similar museums being built in Edwardian Baroque style around the country. For instance, the corner turrets in John Belcher's (1841-1913) design for South Kensington Museum (1891), published by *The Builder* in 1894, anticipate the octagonal domed lantern at the top of the Laing's tower (fig. 6). But the most remarkable resemblances are found with the Bury Art Gallery, by the architects George Harry Willoughby (1858-1934 ca.) and John Henry Woodhouse (1847-1929), whose design was published by *The Builder* in 1901, some months before the Laing's first stone was laid, and which shares with the Laing substantial decorative features, such as the elaborated entrance gate, the grand staircase, the sculpted decorative frieze, the stained glass window, the galleries' high arcade ceilings and the upper-floor round balcony overlooking the hall (fig. 7).

The decorative elements

The decorative features, consubstantial to the Edwardian Baroque, fulfilled the essential role of dignifying the awkward site of the Laing. They also enhanced the building's use by converting it into an artwork unifying architecture, painting and sculpture. Besides the elaborate front door, presided by the Newcastle coat of arms, the main decorative highlight was the distinctive square tower, which acted as an advertising sign, as it was the only element of the Laing visible to the pedestrian in the city centre.[84] Below its octagonal lantern, an Art Nouveau bas-relief featuring female figures, with its winged figure symbolizing the Arts, recalls the Pre-Raphaelite paintings featuring in the Newcastle industrialists' collections. The interior of the

[84] Op. cit. note17, p.235

Fig. 5. The Laing and the Public Library in the early 20th century. Source: TWA.

Fig. 6. Design for Victoria and Albert Museum by John Belcher, Cromwell Road and Exhibition Road fronts, 1894. Source: V&A Prints, Drawings & Paintings Collection.

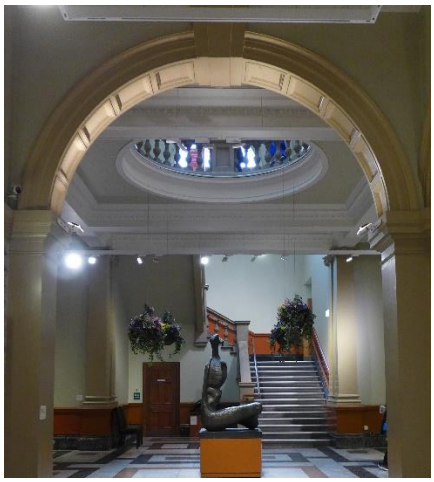
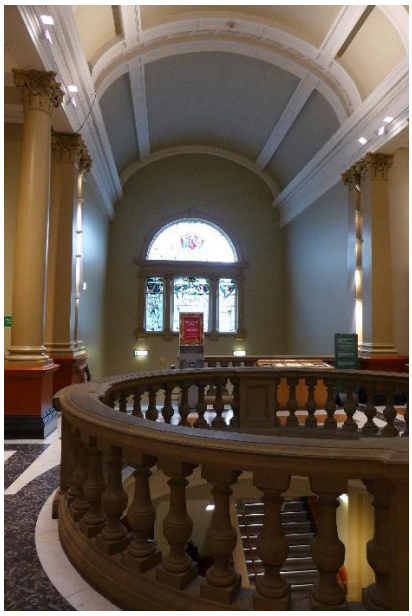
LAING ART GALLERY	BURY ART MUSEUM
	
	
	

Fig. 7. Comparison between the decorative features at the Laing Art Gallery and the Bury Art Museum. Author's pictures (left), Bury Art Museum (right).

building matched the imposing Baroque façade through its materials and decorations. The choice of the local Frosterley marble for the entrance hall floor aimed to provide the building with a North-Eastern identity, this connexion being emphasized through the commission of the stained-glass window to the Newcastle-based artist based artist J. Edgar Mitchell (1871–1922). Further additions to the building's engagement with local art were made between 1924 and 1934 with the commission of eight mural decorations depicting Newcastle's historical scenes, signed by the North-Eastern artists Robert John Scott Bertram (1871-1953), Ralph Bullock (1867-1949), Byron Eric Dawson (1896-1968), Louisa Hodgson (1905-1980), Alfred Kingsley Lawrence (1893-1975), Thomas W. Pattinson (1894-1983), James Walker Tucker (1898-1972) and John Henry Willis (1887-1989). This link was renewed in 1953, with the commission of two further mural decorations for the entrance hall, depicting Newcastle during the time of Queen Elizabeth I (by Dawson) and Queen Elizabeth II (by Pattison), not currently on display.[85]

The building's deficiencies

Cackett and Burns Dick made the most of the small site by creating a hollow square building organized around a central court which lit the entrance and sculpture hall. (figs.8-10) They managed to obtain three lofty decorative/ industrial art and museum galleries on the ground floor and four top-lit picture galleries on the top floor, with a total size of 6,788.42 feet (152ft for gallery A, 182ft for gallery B, 200ft for C and 174ft for D). However, the firm's productivity implied a fast working pace and a wide range of disparate creations, which probably did not allow much time for deep research into the buildings' typologies or the specific requests according to their different uses. The Laing was the only art gallery in the partnership's catalogue and the first purpose-built art gallery in the region. Moreover, it corresponded to a quite recent kind of building, so it is unlikely that Cackett and Burns Dick had the opportunity to examine previously built models (besides the illustrations provided by contemporary architectural journals), or to reflect on the needs of such a specialized

[85] LCM 31-07-1953. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.224.

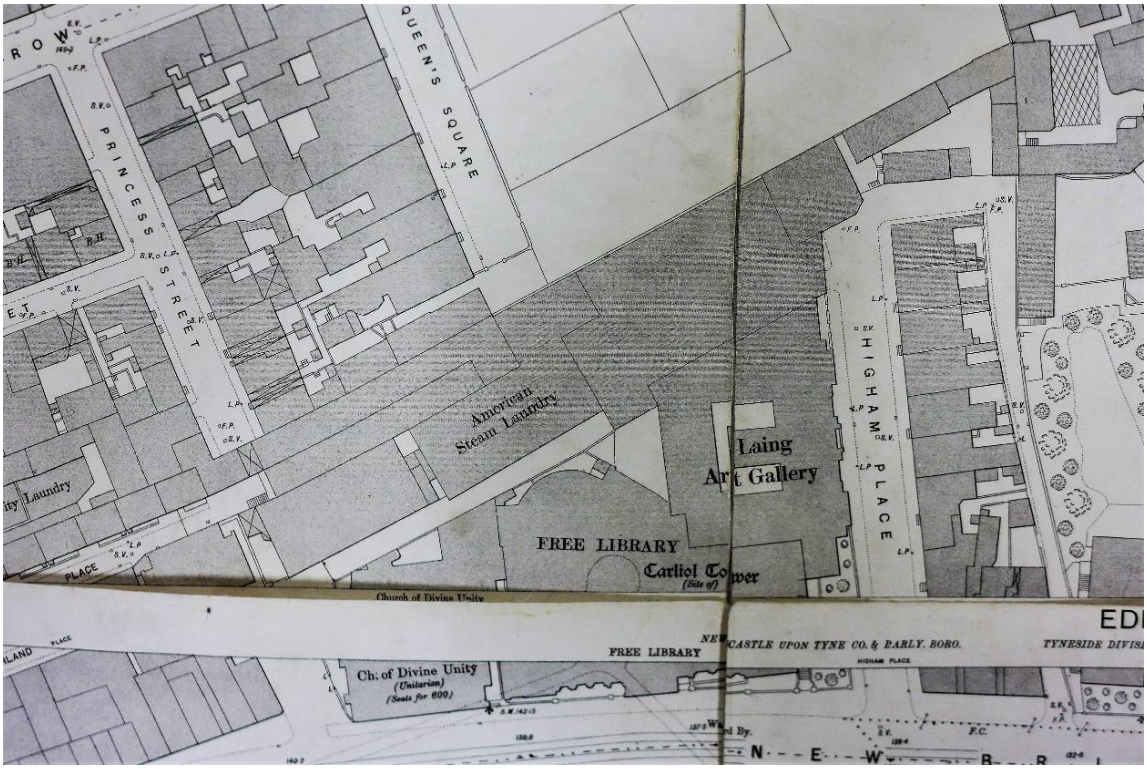


Fig. 8. The Laing's block soon after the opening of the gallery. Newcastle-upon-Tyne map, 1907. XCVII.3.25.

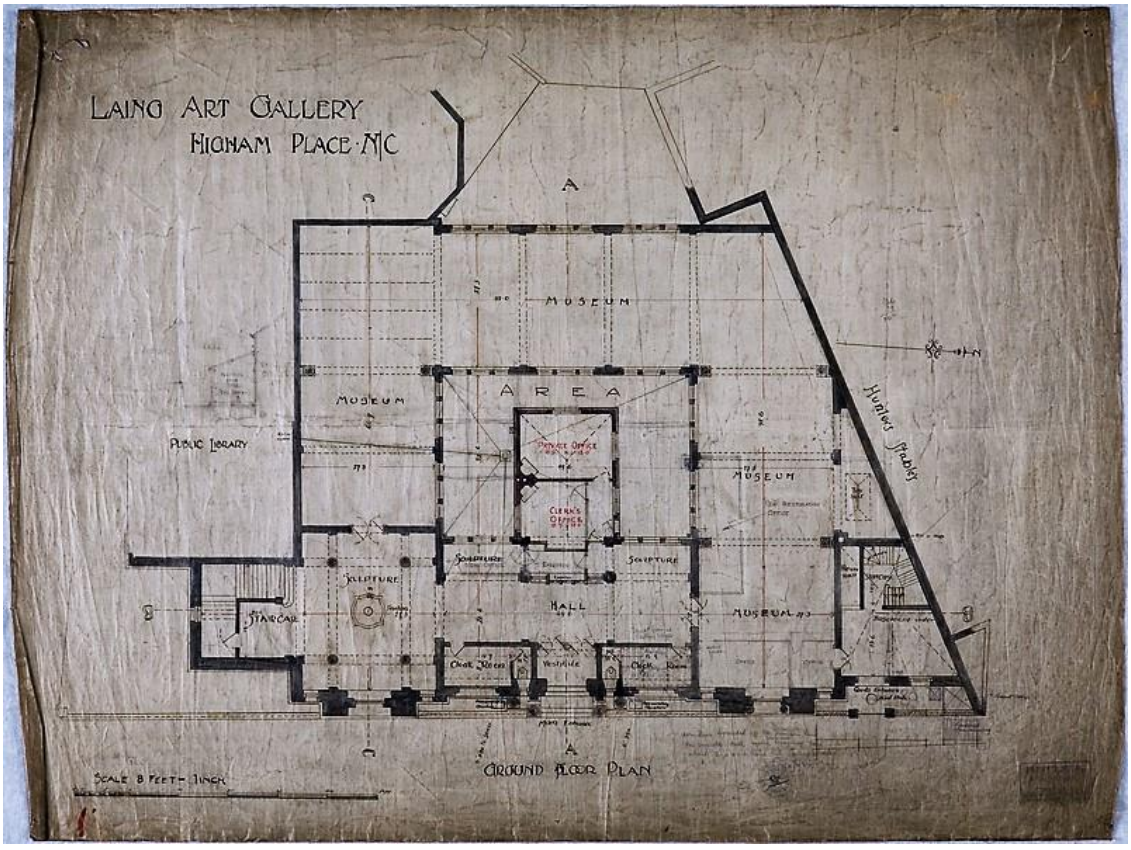


Fig. 9. Laing Art Gallery ground floor plan. Cackett and Burns Dick, 1901.

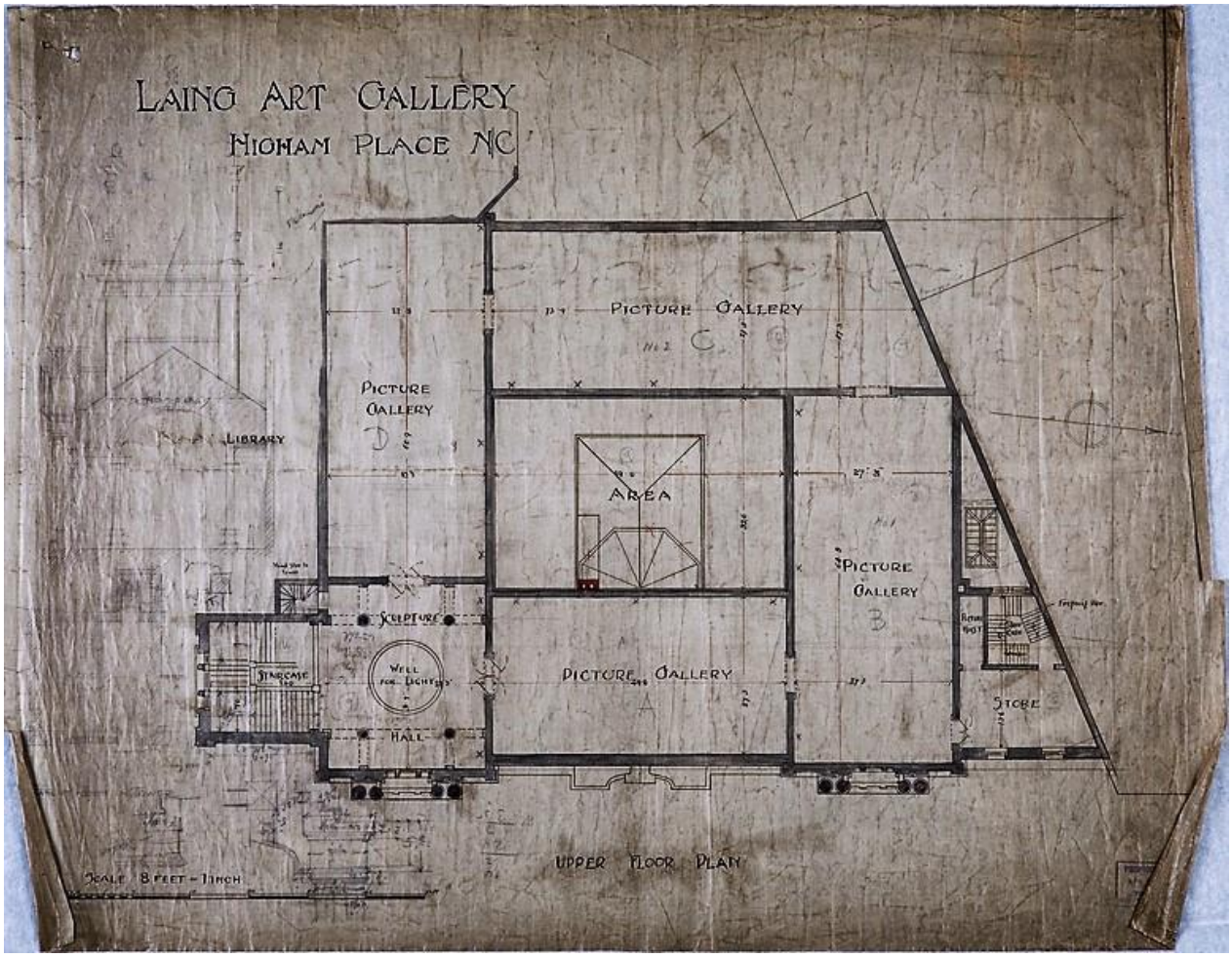


Fig. 10. Laing Art Gallery upper floor plan. Cackett and Burns Dick, 1901.

typology. The awkward site and the hasty construction – owed to Mr. Laing's precarious health condition - increased the challenge, so the versatile architects decided to overcome the difficulties by focusing more on appearances than on functionality. CBS later criticized that 'more consideration was given to the use of stone than to the purpose of the building, and even in 1904 it was far from suitable for its purpose.'[86] The curator complained about the gallery's 'heavy windows, its large columns and the extensive and unnecessary tower', in the view that they required all the money available. Indeed, the original construction estimates of £20,000 soon rose to over £30,000, thus consuming not only the whole provision of funding, but also an extra £2,000 borrowed from the Library rate for fittings and furnishing. The extra cost of the building had a catastrophic effect on the Laing's opening context, as the gallery was forced to open in the most unfavourable conditions: bearing a debt and lacking both an art collection and the funds needed to purchase one (see pp.76-79).

The Times art critic's opinion when visiting the Laing in 1957 matched CBS' views. The building was described as 'typical of its period' and forming 'part of an ornate and heavy block which also houses the public library.'[87] Its surroundings were regarded as 'a miscellaneous collection of offices, warehouses, showrooms, and garages that is typical of the provincial culture-pattern of our own day' and its interior as 'equally at odds with modern conceptions of what an art gallery ought to be'. The article criticized the 'pressure on the existing premises' and the overcrowding of the museum section, stating that it was only 'thanks to Bernard Stevenson's efforts that it manages to do its job so well.'[88] The late date of the article above may suggest that the building's deficiencies were just a consequence of aging or shifts in taste. But instead, the premises had suffered from such issues since the very beginning. For instance, even before the opening, the lack of administrative spaces had already become a problem, as the architects had only planned a small studio for the curator located inside the central courtyard. Therefore, the 'ladies' cloakroom' had to be hurriedly converted into a temporary office.[89] The following year, two small offices were built out on the site of the original curator's studio, but they remained 'too small,

[86] LCM 04-01-1946. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.26.
[87] Anon (25-09-1957). 'Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle. Exhibition in memory of first curator'. *The Times,* n.p.
[88] Ibid.
[89] LCM 15-12-1904. TWA, MD/NC/129/1, p.94

inadequate, undignified and are preventing the gallery from working to its full capacity. They receive little light and deprive the museum from it. With proper offices it would be possible greatly to increase the usefulness of the Gallery.'[90] Despite their limited size, those offices were also used to house the reference books, as the gallery was not provided with a library space. There was no committee room either, so once a month, one of the upper-floor picture galleries had to be closed to the public to host the Committee meetings, whose lack of privacy was criticised.[91] Staff had to endure similar limitations, because there were no workrooms in which to carry out technical duties, and not even a space for meals. Both activities were carried out in the boiler room, where the workers had 'to endure the smoke, fumes and dirt from the boiler and the dust from coal, coke and ash'.[92]

However, lack of storage space was the most pressing concern. Despite the Laing having opened as an empty building, the collection grew fast, and loan exhibitions were held continuously, so as early as 1909, 'several of the large rooms' were already 'utilized to the fullest extent', and CBS stated that 'in the course of a few years […] we will find it difficult to provide accommodation for loan exhibitions, which are so essential to the art education of the people.'[93] The Shipley Bequest, which would have brought an additional space for loan exhibitions and storage, was rejected by the Council in 1912 due to the pressure exerted by prominent citizens who stated that the Laing's premises were 'spacious and convenient, and likely to provide sufficient accommodation for the city's art treasures for many years to come.'[94] Statements like this one evidence the ignorance of local elite regarding the Laing management issues, as already by that time, the whole permanent collection needed to be removed and stored in one of the upper-floor galleries during loan exhibitions, therefore becoming inaccessible to the public during part of the year.[95]

A new opportunity to solve the building's deficiencies arose with the reception, in 1919, of the Joicey Bequest (see pp.51-72). In connection to it, the Council purchased a piece of land on the northern side of the Laing, up to the south of

[90] Stevenson, CB (1954). 'Notes about the Joicey Museum'. TWA T132-54.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Anon (10-03-1910). 'The Shipley Bequest. Newcastle Curator's views.' *Daily Journal,* n.p.
[94] Corder, Percy (09-03-1910). 'The Shipley Bequest.' *Daily Chronicle,* n.p.
[95] Anguix, L. (forthcoming) '"A collection of mere travesties of time-honoured originals." The rejection of the Shipley Bequest.' *Journal of the History of Collections*

Saville Place, which - together with the sites occupied by the Higham Place stables and Matthew Bell's furniture warehouses, belonging to the Public Library - was meant to become the site for the potential Joicey Museum (fig. 11). Hopes were put in this extension which was planned to include not only the much-needed exhibition, store and work rooms, but also an art reference library, a lecture hall, a restoration department and a school museum service, thus connecting with the focus on art education and museum modernization which were key for inter-war museum policies.[96] However, the conditions of Joicey's will meant that the money did not become available until 1942, when the country was engaged in the Second World War, thus delaying the Laing's development indefinitely.

In the meantime, the storage problems had become more excruciating, to the point that by the 1930s it had already been decided that all the portraits of members of the City Council gifted to the Laing would be systematically rejected unless the person had been prominently associated with the development of the Laing.[97] In 1938, negotiations started for the acquisition of a new store-room, but the beginning of the Second World War and the removal of the Laing collection to a safe shelter paused the process whilst providing some relief. This relief, however, was only temporary, and as soon as the return of the collections was announced in 1945, the Laing's foreman expressed his anxiety through an extensive report highlighting that the stores were 'the home of the entire collection for quite long periods, and as so, should be regarded as of equal importance to the galleries, and not just a lumber-room.'[98] He denounced that the two small store-rooms were 'too full for safe handling', that their temperature was not controlled, thus affecting 'the safety and care of valuable works of art' and that the whole space was 'in deplorable conditions and totally inadequate for the housing of the collections, especially when a Special Exhibition is being held and the permanent collection has to be temporarily stored' (figs.12 and 13).[99] The report concluded that storage space was 'a vital and immediate necessity', urging the closure of the ground floor to provide storage until a more permanent solution could be found. Consequently, the whole museum section

[96] Pearson, C. (2008). *Curators, culture and conflict. The effects of the Second World War on Museums in Britain, 1926-1965.* (Unpublished Doctoral thesis). UCL, London, U.K., p. 85.
[97] LCM 29-05-1931. TWA MD/NC/129/4, p.150.
[98] LCM 29-06-1945. TWA MD/NC/129/6, p.12
[99] Ibid.

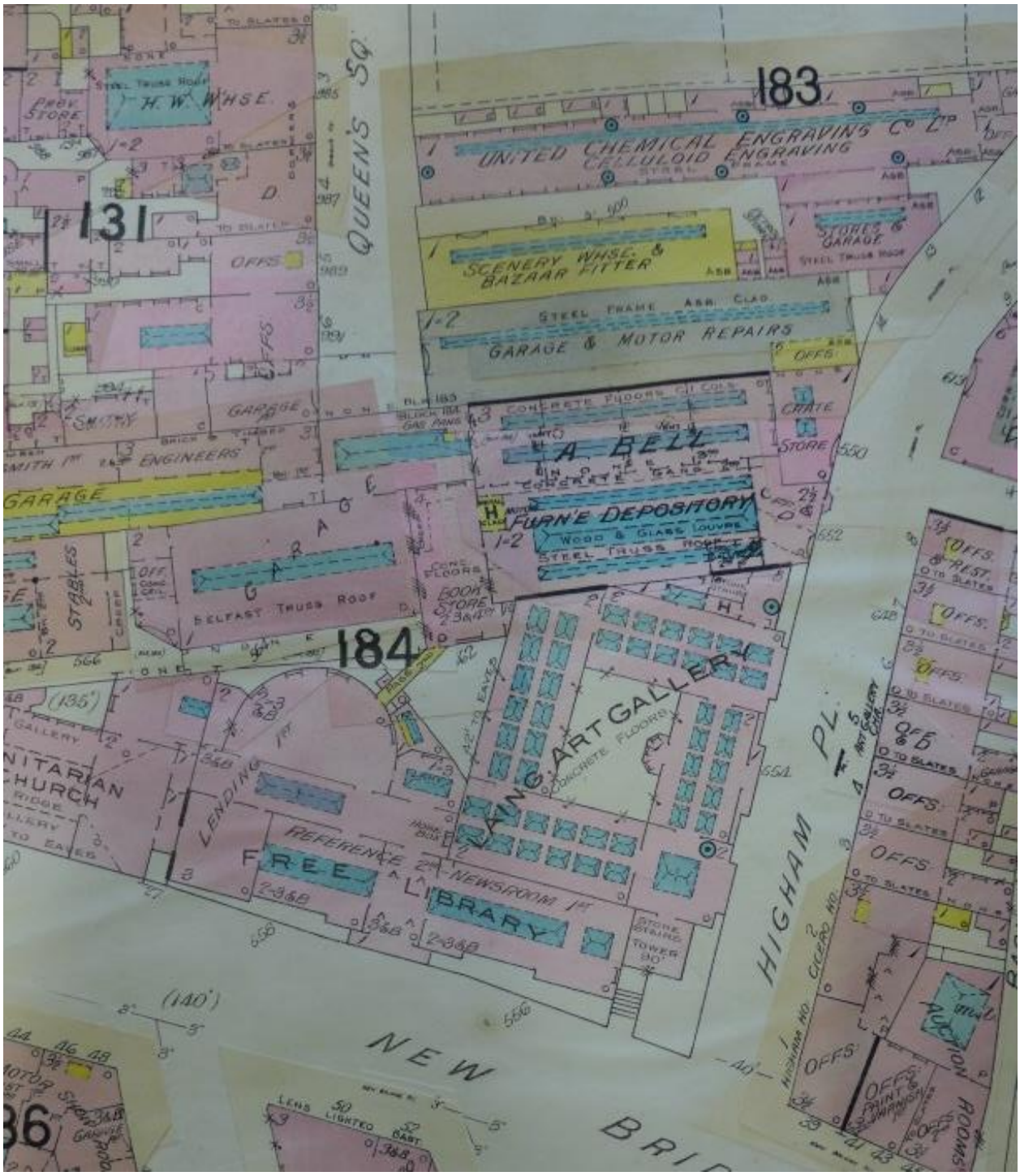
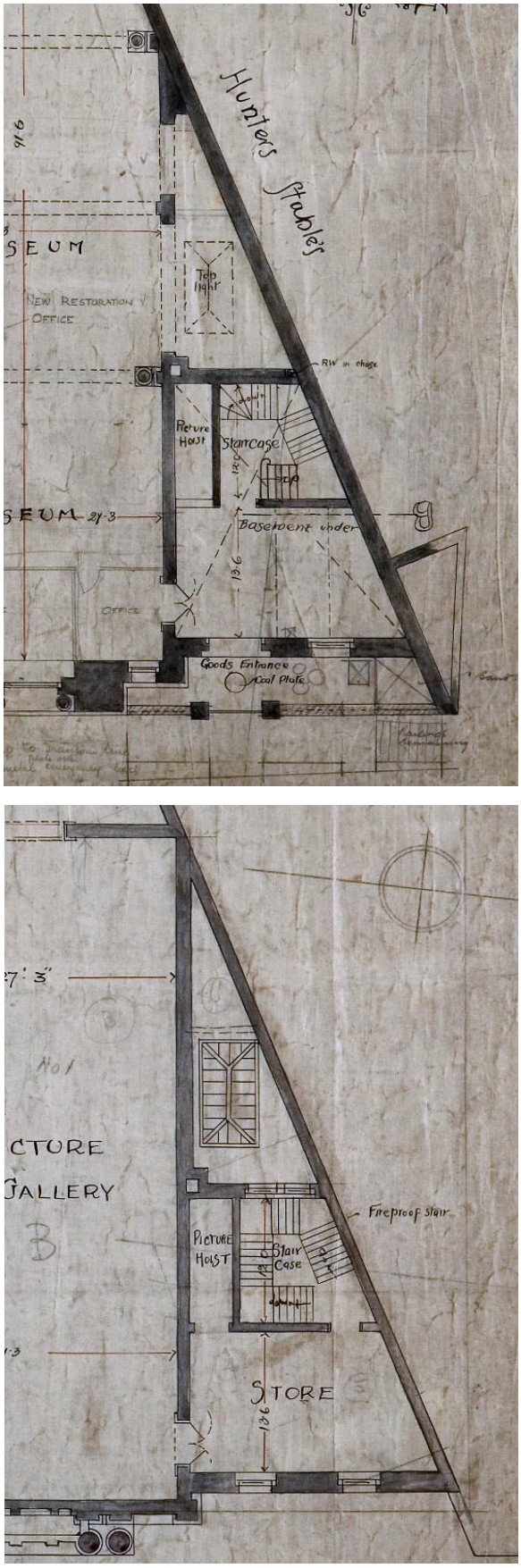


Fig. 11. The Laing block and the Joicey site shortly after the purchase of the land. Newcastle-upon-Tyne Insurance Map, 1930. Chas. E. Goad Ltd. Civil Engineers.



Figs.12 and 13. Detail of the Laing's original store-rooms. Ground floor (up) and first floor (down). Cacket and Burns Dick, 1901.

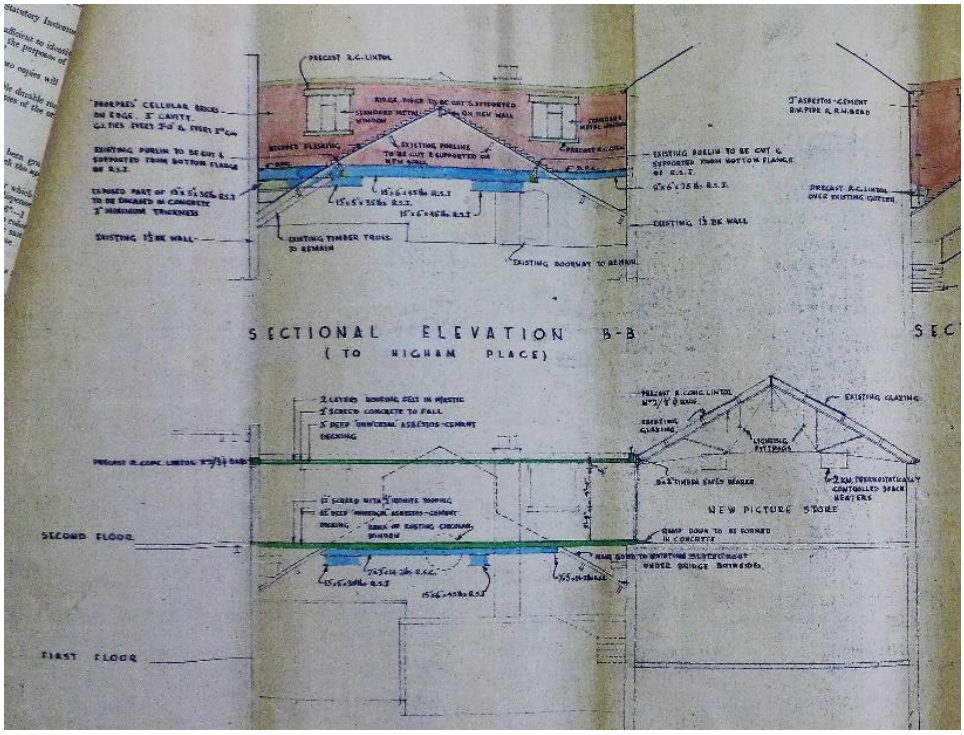
– hitherto exhibiting objects related to the industrial past of Tyneside as well as the Joicey collection of local history - was closed to the public and transformed into a temporary warehouse.

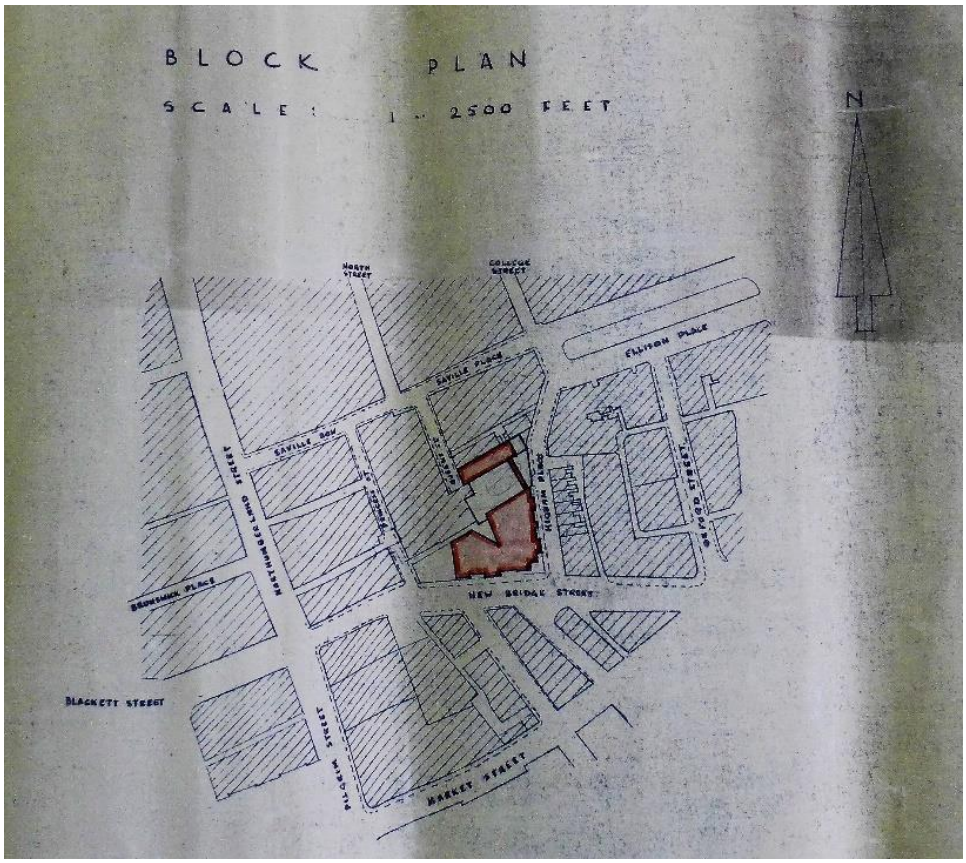
To face the situation, the Laing Committee considered different solutions, such as the erection of temporary store rooms and workshops on the site reserved for the future Joicey Museum, or even the demolition of the Laing and its relocation to the new Civic Centre which was being planned at that time. It was finally decided to build a new store-room in the upper part of Bell's Furniture Repository, in Higham Place, for which arrangements with the City Library (which owned the premises) had to be made.[100] The place did not have a direct entrance from the Laing, so an access bridge was planned and an annual rent of £175 agreed to be paid to the Library (figs.14 and 15). The solution was meant to be temporary, because the building was scheduled to be demolished and the land to become the site for the new Library building and the Joicey Museum, but this circumstance did not make matters easier. On the one hand, the Laing had to face the opposition of the Library authorities, who were concerned about the occupation of the land purchased for the Library extension, and who insisted upon the convenience of moving the Laing to the new Civic Centre, so that the gallery building could be demolished and a new Library created on the old Laing's site (see pp.59-72).[101]

On the other hand, the project was delayed due to the shortage of building materials that affected Britain in the post-war period, and that led the Government to prioritize construction works for schools and houses. The problem went beyond the creation of the temporary warehouse, as it impacted upon the Joicey Museum project and raised the prices of materials and labour up to the point at which the new building started to become an unviable dream that could not be trusted anymore as a solution for the Laing's structural problems. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government delayed the permissions for the creation of the access bridge for several years with different excuses, whilst CBS kept on denouncing

> the amount of time and work which has been devoted to this question;
> the serious congestion in the museum owing to the fact that a large part

[100] LCM 08-11-1949. TWA MD/NC/129/6, pp.117-118.
[101] Hinton, E.A. (23-03-1954). Letter to C.B. Stevenson. TWA T132-54.





Figs.14 and 15. Sectional elevation of the access bridge and block plan. Newcastle City Architects (1950).

> of it has had to be closed for storage purposes; and the very real danger of loss through deterioration of valuable pictures in the permanent collections resulting from overcrowding and bad ventilation in the insufficient store-rooms.[102]

The curator's notes detail how the building's deficiencies conditioned the daily routines at the gallery. For instance, the absence of rooms for unpacking the artworks meant that 'when cases arrive at the Gallery, part of the museum has to be closed for this purpose, which causes not only delays and waste of time but a serious curtailment of the facilities and amenities offered by the institution to the public.'[103] He referred to the storage-rooms as 'awkwardly-shaped and unsatisfactory, exposed to the dust, dirt and smoke of the boiler room' and he detailed the attempts to adapt them by building false floors and wooden structures, although 'every available corner is utilized, so it is impossible to store the collections in any logical order'.[104] These reflections go beyond the Laing's particular case to offer an overview of the difficulties faced by the curators of his times in connection to 'the inadequacy of existing museum buildings for their purpose.'[105] For instance, CBS' allusion to the storage system of the reserve collections of the Cardiff Museum, which had reopened in a new location in 1922, evidences good knowledge of the recommendations of the Miers Report.[106] He compared this example with the fact that

> Only ten percent of the museum buildings in Britain were erected as such, and only a few of those were well designed. It is thought that only exhibition space is needed, and work-rooms and storage spaces are forgotten. In ninety percent of the cases, every work related with the museum has to be done in the small, dingy curator's office, and the lack of storage spaces means that the cases must be overcrowded, or the extension of collections must be declined. One of the worst features of provincial museums is the appalling overcrowding.[107]

The Laing's storage problems were partially solved after the access bridge was finally built in 1954, and the new storeroom put in use in 1955, so the museum

[102] LCM 08-02-1952. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.179.
[103] Op. cit. note 88.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Op. cit. note 63, p.25.
[107] Op. cit. note 97.

section, which had been closed since 1939, could finally re-open in 1956 (fig. 16).[108] Still in 2019, the narrow and low post-war access bridge and the temporary warehouse are the Laing's only storage premises, thus evidencing that the gallery's working conditions have not changed substantially (figs.17 and 18).

C. THE JOHN GEORGE JOICEY BEQUEST AND MUSEUM

In the context of the Laing's deficiencies, the Joicey Bequest acquires its full significance. At a local level, the story behind the most munificent and the most controversial donation ever made to the Laing is the chronicle of a lost opportunity. Together with the rejection of the Shipley Bequest, the episode is probably the best example of the Newcastle Council's disinterest towards arts matters in the first half of the twentieth century. But - thanks to the preservation of archival material containing CBS' comments and reflections on the matter - the Joicey issue can also be understood in the wider context of the needs and deficiencies of British regional museums during the inter-war and post-war periods, thus acquiring further significance within museum history. This section details the circumstances surrounding the Joicey Bequest, whilst giving some hints of its significance as a case study of the difficulties historically faced by the curators of British regional galleries.

John George Joicey and his connection to the Laing

Little is known about this North-Eastern millionaire art collector (1873?-1919), probably born in Durham or Gateshead, although he spent much of his adult life either in London - where he stayed at the conservative Junior Carlton Club (Pall Mall) - or abroad. He was the youngest son of the second marriage of Sir James Joicey, 1st Baron Joicey (1846–1936), a coal mining magnate from Tanfield, Durham, and a British Liberal Party politician. Despite being cousin to Lord Joicey of Ford Castle, Northumberland, John G. Joicey's fortune may have come from the family mining company, James Joicey & Co Limited, founded by his father's uncle James Joicey.[109] Like other members of the local elite, he had been a member of the

[108] LCM 26-11-1954. TWA, MD/NC/129/7, p.11.
[109] Anon. (26-07-1919), 'Fine Art Museum for Newcastle. Important bequest', *Daily Journal,* n.p.

Fig. 16. The new store-room in 1957. TWA.

Figs.17 and 18. The 1954 access bridge and store-room nowadays. Author's pictures.

Tyne Improvement Commission.[110] Nevertheless, by the time of his death, he had not been actively engaged in business in Newcastle for a long time, so apparently, his only connection to the city was his interest in the Laing, which he visited often, as he was a member of its committee and had often declared 'his intention to offer it a gift, although the war interfered'.[111]

The origin of Joicey's connection with the Laing seems to have been an accidental meeting with CBS taking place in 1909, while the curator was visiting the V&A Circulation Loan Section to select objects for temporary exhibitions at the Laing. There, he was introduced to Joicey by one of the officers of the Circulation Department. CBS described the collector as 'a wealthy art connoisseur who spent his time travelling in Britain and abroad to select works of art' which he gave or lent to museums and art galleries.[112] Joicey, who had many valuable loans at the V&A, became interested in CBS's work and visited the Laing in autumn 1909. Then, in 1910, he sent some pottery and porcelain loans, whose arrangement at the gallery he checked shortly after, and, 'feeling satisfied on how these objects had been curated and exhibited', continued sending objects.[113] By 1911, the connection with the Laing had strengthened so much that Joicey transferred to Newcastle part of his collections of pottery and porcelain on loan at the V&A.

The acquaintance between both men continued for ten years, and during this time Joicey kept on adding new monthly loans of pottery, porcelain, watches, silver and pictures. On his visits to London, CBS routinely visited the collector at his hotel. As the curator used to mention the space shortage at the Laing, Joicey started to consider the idea of sponsoring a new museum, which he would like to be called the Joicey Museum. CBS discussed the idea with the Chairman of the Laing Committee, Alderman Johnstone Wallace (d.1923), who told him that the Corporation would eventually agree to acquire land for this extension. During 1915, Joicey and the curator exchanged various letters regarding the new museum, and in April that year, CBS, on occasion of the Laing's representatives' annual visit to London for the RA

[110] Anon. (01-10-1918). 'Elections of Commissioners and Auditor', *Shields Daily News,* p.1a.
[111] Anon. (26-7-1919). 'New Museum for Newcastle. Mr. J.G. Joicey earmarks L50 000. Gifts to the Laing Art Gallery'. *Daily Chronicle*, n.p.
[112] Stevenson, C.B. (01-1947). 'Report of the Curator outlining the History and circumstances of the John G. Joicey Bequest.' TWA, T132-54.
[113] Joicey, J.G. (23-03-1910). Letter to C.B. Stevenson. TWA, T132-54.

exhibition, organized the first meeting between the donor and the Laing Chairman and Vice-Chairman, Councillor Alfred J. Robinson (n.d.).[114] During this meeting, Joicey confirmed his intentions and expressed his desire that the new street which at that moment the Newcastle City Council was planning to open from Pilgrim Street to Barras Bridge would be called Joicey Street. In the subsequent letters, Joicey inquired about the land available and about the architects of the Laing and offered £25,000 for a building which could be started after the end of the war.

Parallel to the negotiations for the creation of the new museum, the loans to the Laing continued, especially those related to local history, since Joicey, who was a benefactor of the London Museum, admired the educational value of this institution and wanted to create a museum of local history in Newcastle following this line, with one gallery devoted to his collection of objects. This preference connects with the late-Victorian interest both towards education and exaltation of imperial pride, which had led to major shows like the 'Old Glasgow Exhibition' of 1894.[115] In the case of the Laing, it materialised in the exhibition 'Old Newcastle', which acquired a special significance because of its connection with the context of the First World War (see pp.83-85). Its success led Joicey to ask CBS to continue acquiring objects connected to local history, so the Laing gradually purchased local silver, pottery, glass, and paintings of Newcastle, as well as the whole Mackey collection - comprising thousands of examples of local themed engravings, plans, documents and drawings -. Joicey was enthusiastic about this acquisition, so, on his way from Edinburgh to London, in 1919, he stopped in Newcastle to see it. This was his last visit to the Laing, as he died from a brief illness shortly afterwards.[116]

Contents and conditions of the Joicey Bequest

Besides the £50,000 for the creation of the Joicey Museum of Local History, Joicey bequeathed to the Laing the whole of his collections of paintings and industrial art on loan at that moment at the gallery. The pieces, collected on Joicey's trips all around

[114] Joicey, J.G. (21-04-1915). Letter to C.B. Stevenson. TWA, T132-54.
[115] Op. cit. note 63, p.189. Also, for the donors' preference towards donations related to local history, and their impact in shaping museum collections, see: Hill, K. (2005). *Culture and class in public museums, 1850-1914.* Aldershot: Ashgate, p.73.
[116] Anon (25-07-1919). 'Mr. J.G. Joicey Earmarks £50 000. Gifts to the Laing Art Gallery'. *Evening Chronicle*, n.p.

Europe, had an estimated value of £30,000 in 1919.[117] There were English, Spanish and Italian embroideries from the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, silver and Newcastle plate, English, French, Dutch, German and Italian pottery and porcelain, enamelled and silver watches, feudal arms and armour, Flemish and Italian paintings and oils and watercolours signed by artists like Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), T. Sidney Cooper (1803-1902), Sir E. Landseer (1802-1873), Lord Leighton (1830-1896), J. Seymour Lucas (1849-1923), Sir William Orpen (1878-1931) and John Charlton (1849-1917). Besides the artworks directly donated to the Laing, a series of curios and articles of virtu, stored at the Chancery Lane Safe Depository, London, were scheduled to be divided between the London Museum, the V&A and the Laing in the following way: 'the London Museum will take all the articles of London origin or of special interest to London, the V&A all those of foreign origin, and the Laing, the balance. If there's any dispute, the trustees will decide.'[118] Moreover, the V&A was bequeathed Sevres porcelain, English and foreign china, gold enamel watches and snuffboxes, inlaid guns and furniture, whilst the London Museum received objects for a value of £50-60,000 and 'the balance of Joicey's estate after bequests to relatives […] to form a fund, the income from the which shall be applied as the trustees of [the] museum think fit in the purchase of articles, specimens, curios, etc.'.[119]

Regarding the funds for the Joicey Museum, the will specified that the money would only be available after the deaths of Mr. James Joicey (Joicey's half-brother, born from Lord Joicey's first marriage) and Mrs Fulton (Joicey's sister), which took place in 1926 and 1942 respectively.[120] After the payment of death duties, only £33,000 remained, which were invested in savings bonds, as it was agreed that nothing could be done until the end of the Second World War. By 1958, the money available amounted to £42,670, but the new museum was still to be built.[121] The following paragraphs give light on the reasons behind this delay.

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[117] 'Miscellaneous papers relating to the Report on the History and Circumstances of the Joicey Bequest.' TWA, T132-55.
[118] Anon. (25-07-1919). 'Mr. J.G. Joicey Earmarks £50 000. Gifts to the Laing Art Gallery'. *Evening Chronicle*, n.p., and Anon. (11-11-1919). 'Mr. J.G. Joicey's will. Gifts to the Laing Art Gallery. L50 000 to found a new museum in Newcastle'. *Evening Chronicle*, n.p.
[119] Victoria & Albert Museum. *John George Joicey Bequest.* http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/j/john-george-joicey.
[120] Luxmore, A.A. (26-03-1956). Letter to Professor Lawrence Gowing. TWA, T132-55.
[121] Forster, M. (25-07-1958). 'Report of the Town Clerk to the Laing Committee regarding the Joicey Bequest.' TWA, T132-55.

The purchase of the land

As had happened with the creation of the Laing, finding an adequate site was one of the first obstacles faced in the achievement of the potential Joicey Museum. In 1921, the Laing Committee considered with this purpose the purchase of Jesmond Towers, former residence of the recently deceased C.W. Mitchell.[122] Maybe because of business connections, the Laing Committee members advocated for this option enthusiastically. They stated that the building did not need big alterations, and that it was easy to reach from the city. Its cost (£30,000) was also considered appropriate, as it would leave a balance of the bequest for reconstruction and equipment.[123] The proposal, however, faced CBS' opposition, for he believed that it was preferable to 'bring the whole of the collections together instead of being scattered over the various parts of the city'.[124] This statement suggests that, already at this early stage, the curator was prioritising the Laing's needs and considering how the Joicey museum could become a way to solve them.

The first discussions regarding the potential of a piece of land behind the Public Library seem to have taken place almost contemporarily with the Jesmond Towers discussion, as the place was already mentioned at a meeting held with the Lord Mayor and the Joicey trustees in November 1921, although the Laing committee did not present a report on the matter to the Council until three years later.[125] And because the site was divided between different owners, its purchase (costing nearly £24,000) was not completed until 1926.[126] As often happened during the Laing's early history, the operation could only succeed thanks to the personal determination of the Laing Committee, one of whose members - the shipowner and former Mayor of Newcastle Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland (1867-1953) - even purchased and held the first piece of land. The money for the transaction was also an issue, as the Council did not possess the necessary funds, which had to be loaned by the Minister of Health. The fact that the land was stated as 'purchased by the Council on the recommendation of the Laing Committee for the Joicey Museum and cannot be used

[122] Anon. (29-11-1921) 'John George Joicey Museum. Proposed Scheme. Bequest Foundation may be Jesmond Towers'. *Daily Journal*, n.p.
[123] TWA, T132-54.
[124] TWA, T132-54.
[125] NCR 06-02-1924, p.160. L352-N536 (1). NCL.
[126] NCR 27-10-1926, p.1041. L352-N536 (1). NCL.

except for the Laing or other municipal purposes' caused much controversy with the neighbouring City Library at a later stage.[127] Surprisingly, in the same year the Laing was making efforts to purchase this land, Newcastle Council awarded the Society of Antiquaries a site adjoining the Black Gate for the creation of a Museum of Local History, which may suggest a favouritism towards this privately-funded institution.[128]

The reactivation of the negotiations after 1945

The twenty-six years elapsed since the reception of the Joicey Bequest, together with the forty-one years of experience at the head of the Laing had provided CBS with the necessary position from which to reflect upon the Laing's shortcomings and the requirements of the Joicey museum. His experience was complemented by a theoretical knowledge of the facilities and difficulties existing in other British regional museums, obtained through a lifetime of contact with other curators and attendance at the MA annual meetings. Therefore, after the end of the Second World War and the reactivation of planning for the Joicey Museum, the way in which the curator expressed his views was clear and authoritative. He stated, for instance, that the aim of the new building would be to host the whole of the local historical collection together with Joicey's gifts, so that the Laing could host only pictures, which was Alexander Laing's original intention.[129] He also suggested requesting a contribution from the Corporation so that the new building would not lack funding for its construction. This would avoid it getting the defects affecting the Laing building, such as the lack of administrative offices or storage accommodation. When one of the trustees suggested that £33,000 would be scarcely adequate for the building, CBS replied that the Joicey museum would not have all the unnecessary ornaments of the Laing, as it would be built on modern lines. His statement was supported by a plan by Mr Richmond, City Architect, showing a Museum which could be completed within the available budget, taking consideration that the funds would have increased by the time the constructions works began (fig. 19). The 1946 plan already shows six galleries, plus storage accommodation and administrative offices, but still lacks the supplementary features (such as a lecture theatre or a reference library) appearing

[127] Forster, M. (25-07-1958). 'Report of the Town Clerk to the Laing Committee.' TWA, T132-55
[128] Anon (01-1926). *Museums Journal,* vol.25, p.207.
[129] Joicey Sub-Committee Minutes (22-03-1946). TWA T132-54.

in later designs, thus suggesting that CBS' reflections on the matter only took place once the negotiations had reached a more developed stage. In any case, and due to the post-war difficulties, this initial building proposal was soon discarded.[130]

The proposal at the new Civic Centre

The proposals to accommodate the Joicey museum inside the new Civic Centre which was about to be built also date from that same year, although the idea was categorically rejected by CBS claiming that the Joicey should be built next to the Laing. The curator defended this connection as mutually beneficial for both institutions at an administrative level, whilst arguing that the new museum should be placed on the site which had been acquired according to Joicey's wishes, warning the Sub-Committee that the collector 'wanted his museum connected to the Laing, and any other decision would be disrespectful, unscrupulous and dishonest.'[131] He also defended this option as the fastest solution, in the belief that the Civic Centre might take longer to be completed.

However, his reasons did not seem to convince the Joicey Sub-Committee, as the argument was brought back at the following meeting, when Mr Parr (City Engineer) stated that the Joicey Museum would look better within the civic centre, and that the building in Saville Place would take at least ten years to commence.[132] The trustees agreed that the Civic Centre was a good option, because they considered the money from the bequest was not enough to build a museum. One of the newly appointed trustees, Lord Gort (1886–1946), even suggested spending the money on buying period furniture, something that provoked an angry reaction from CBS, who considered this proposal as disrespectful to Joicey's will, personal wishes and taste, as the collector had never shown any interest in period furniture during his life. He also pointed out that the Laing did not have any storage room for keeping objects of that size.[133]

CBS' numerous writings on the matter reflect his concern that the proposal to build

[130] Joicey Sub-Committee Minutes (18-10-1946). TWA T132-54.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Stevenson, C.B. (25-1-1947). Letter to A.A. Luxmore. T132-54.

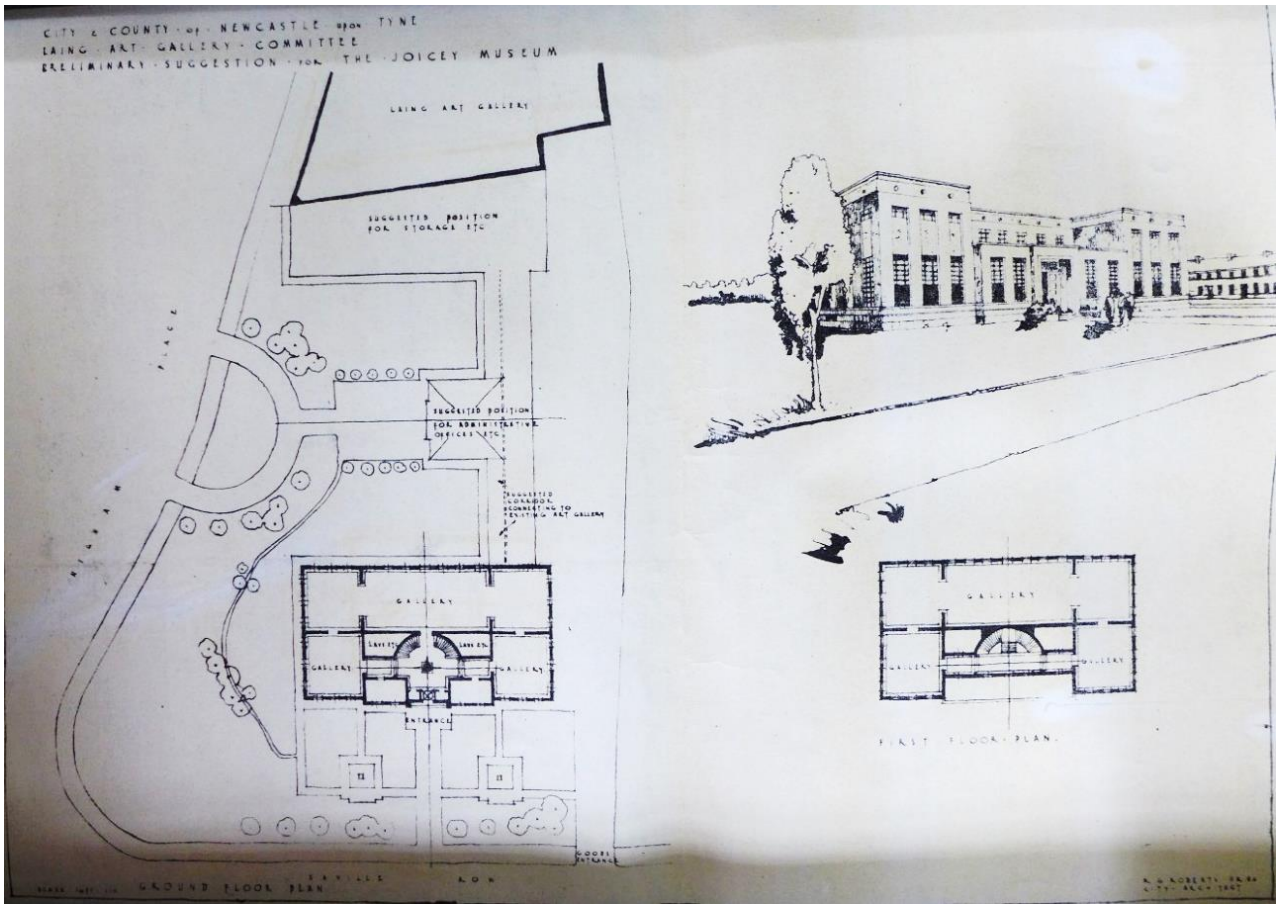


Fig. 19. Preliminary suggestion for the Joicey Museum. City Architects (1946). TWA.

the Joicey at the Civic Centre would mean the loss of the much valued land adjoining the Laing: 'if the Civic Centre is not carried out, owing to the continuance of post-war difficulties for the next years, and the Joicey Museum site is sold for business premises, what happens to the Joicey Museum?'[134] As the idea of creating an Art Gallery inside the Civic Centre was very active at that moment, CBS also took many personal notes trying to list the reasons why the Laing and the Joicey would be more useful for the society acting as branch institutions of the Civic Centre Art Gallery. In the idea that 'too much centralization is a mistake', he mentioned the examples of Manchester, Sheffield, Leicester, Stoke on Trent, Hull and Norwich (all of which had several public museums in the 1940s), thus evidencing that his knowledge of the British museum sector in the mid-twentieth century and his ideas about the needs of the Laing were already diverging irremediably from the opinions of the politicians and social elites in charge of decision-making in Newcastle.[135]

The argument with the City Library

Although the Civic Centre proposal was eventually discarded, CBS was still concerned about the future of the land acquired by the Council, as the rapid developments occurring in the city after the end of the war potentially threatened the proposed site (see pp.145-150). In fact, some of his personal to-do lists collect the 'need to approach the Minister of Town and Planning with regard to the Joicey Museum, in order to build it as soon as possible, before something else is built on the land acquired.'[136] The concerns proved to be right in 1954, when the proposal for the extension of the City Library and the enlargement of Princess Street arrived.

These changes included a proposal to move the Laing to the planned new Civic Centre, leaving the gallery's former site for an enlargement of the Library premises. CBS' rejection of the scheme was contested by the Library Authorities by advising against the Laing's warehouse, which was about to be built at a land belonging to the Library.[137] Indeed, the development of Princess Street under discussion at that moment affected both the City Library and the Laing, as it implied that the existing

[134] Ibid.
[135] TWA, T-132-55.
[136] TWA, T-132-54.
[137] Stevenson, C.B. (03-05-1954). Letter to A. Hinton. TWA, T132-54.

library premises in New Bridge Street would be taken over by the Laing to be used as an extension of the gallery, and that the Bell's Furniture Depository (which was owned by the Library), together with the area of land extending to Saville Row (and owned by the Laing), would form the site for a new Central Library.[138] CBS was against the idea of giving up the Joicey site to the new Library and placing the new Joicey Museum inside the Library's old premises, and he defended the need of a new and modern building as more adequate for the display of objects.[139] To support this idea, he contacted the Secretary of RIBA, asking for illustrations regarding recently built galleries and Museums, to show at a Council meeting.[140] Although the answer to this letter has not survived in the records, it is quite likely that it referred to American art galleries (such as the Paul Getty Museum, built in 1954 or the Frye Art Museum in Seattle, 1952), as no newly-built museums had opened in the UK since the outbreak of the Second World War.

As the Library proposals insisted in building its news premises on the land facing Saville Row - which the Laing considered to be 'the Joicey site' - the Laing Committee unanimously decided to not give up the land bought by the Council for the Joicey Museum.[141] Discussions regarding the transferral of the Laing to a new site took place, although decisions on the matter were deferred until the return of CBS, who was absent due to illness. Once back on duty, the curator reported against the demolition of the Laing building, explaining that it was already part of the historical background of the city, its domed campanile being a landmark, and an emotional connection for the gifts and bequests of many donors and art lovers. He insisted that the Laing was already an established gallery, quoted in dozens of books, whilst trying to explain how expensive it would be to build a new gallery.[142]

In the meantime, CBS kept on writing notes for himself, either complaining about the situation or trying to find alternative solutions. The large volume of these personal papers evidences the relevance given to the Joicey Museum and to the controversy over the City Library development plans. One of the complaints was connected to the fact that - although it belonged to the Corporation – the land had been bought by

[138] Libraries Committee Report (18-06-1954). TWA, T132-54.
[139] TWA, T132-54.
[140] Stevenson, C.B. (13-09-1954). Letter to the RIBA Secretary. TWA, T132-54.
[141] LCM 26-11-1954. TWA MD/NC/129/7, p.11.
[142] TWA, T-132-54.

request of the Laing Committee, by great effort because of its many owners.[143] If it had not been because of the Laing's initiatives, the land would not belong to the Corporation. Besides, Joicey's decision to provide funding for the new museum had been influenced by the reassurance that the Corporation would provide a site adjacent to the gallery. Regarding the potential solutions, CBS' proposals pointed to possible joint options for the Laing and the Library, especially with the idea that both institutions dealt with the educational and cultural side of the city. He proposed the creation of two separate buildings with two separate entrances, but which would have in common a lecture theatre/concert hall, restaurant/tea room, laboratory, store rooms and workshops in a double basement. He proposed solving the limitation of space and the future extension by increasing the number of floors. The inspiration for this space may have come from the large extension carried out in Liverpool's Walker Gallery, which had reopened in 1933 with a new double basement featuring a lecture theatre, restaurant, laboratory, store rooms and workshops, a ground floor with five galleries, one first floor with five galleries, a second floor with five galleries and a top floor with committee room, administrative offices and photographic rooms. CBS knowledge of the Walker's extension is probably linked both to his attendance at the MA annual conferences, and to his friendship with the Walker's former Director, Edward Rimbault Dibdin (1853-1941).[144] Another possible inspiration for CBS' ideas may have been the Leeds Museum, which had been built in a single block, housing the Library, the Art Gallery and the City Museum, with the three institutions having separate entrances and common Committee rooms, goods entrance and loading dock.[145]

Discussions between the Laing and the City Library continued very actively into 1955. The Laing Committee definitely resolved that the old Laing building would be retained, and the City Architect was asked to prepare an outline for the future development of the Joicey building in Saville Place. However, these plans, known as 'scheme A' (fig. 20), showed a Joicey Museum squeezed between the Laing and the new Central Library, which would be built in the corner between Saville Place and Queen's Square and fronting Saville Place. The Laing Committee rejected this plan,

[143] Ibid.
[144] Dibdin, E.R. (12-1933). 'Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, Extension'. *Museums Journal*, vol.33, no.9, p.338. The friendship between both curators will be further detailed on chapter 3.
[145] Wrathmell, S. & Minnis, J. (2005). *Leeds. Pevsner architectural guides*. London: Yale University Press, pp. 74–79.

which had been previously approved by the Library Committee, and asked the architect to prepare an alternative scheme with the Joicey having a frontage to Saville Place and the Library placed between the Laing and the Joicey. Five alternative schemes, labelled from 'A' to 'E' (figs.21-24), were then drafted. It was agreed that the land fronting on to the New Princess Street and New Bridge Street should be allocated for shopping and business, and that the remainder would be allocated to the two Committees to decide upon and submit a scheme for approval. On 30 September, the City Architect submitted the Laing Committee plans for schemes A-D, and a model of scheme B, which was a slight variation of scheme A and which had been approved by the Libraries Committee giving the argument that the land acquired for the Joicey had been bought with money from the Corporation, not from the Joicey bequest, so it might legally be used for other purposes than a museum, and that the Laing Art Gallery would be joined to the new museum, which in turn would be linked to the new library by a Lecture Theatre available for both institutions. The Library Committee concluded that - as the development was unlikely to take place at that time - useful progress could be made by securing the Council's approval to the eventual disposition of the buildings. The Laing Committee rejected this option because they wanted the Library between the museum and the Laing and the Joicey facing Saville Place, but they asked the architect to divide the site in order to allow a frontage for the Joicey onto Saville Place and Higham Place, leaving the Western portion (with frontages to Saville Place and Queen's Square) to the library. Following these instructions, the City Architect submitted Scheme F (fig. 25). The matter was deferred for the curator to report on the utilization of the additional galleries, which he did immediately (as stated in the following paragraphs, he had been thinking at length about this subject).

Despite the efforts to offer solutions, the Laing's requests were not heeded, and the Library Committee continued with the original idea, which was even published by the press as an imminent event, including a model and the suggestion that the Laing disapproved the proposal (fig.26).[146] On seeing the article, CBS' expressed his disappointment to the Chairman of the Laing Committee, Alderman William Temple (n.d.), regretting the inequality with the Library, which had recently been modernized

[146] Anon (23-04-1956). 'New Library and Museum plan for the city". *Journal & North Mail*, n.p.

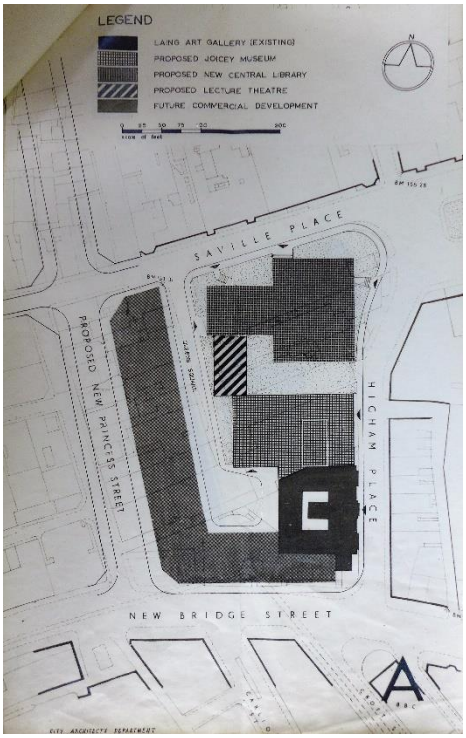


Fig. 20. Scheme A: Central Library on the North of the site, Joicey adjacent to the Laing. Link between the two new buildings by a Lecture Theatre and Concert Hall (1955). TWA T132-79.

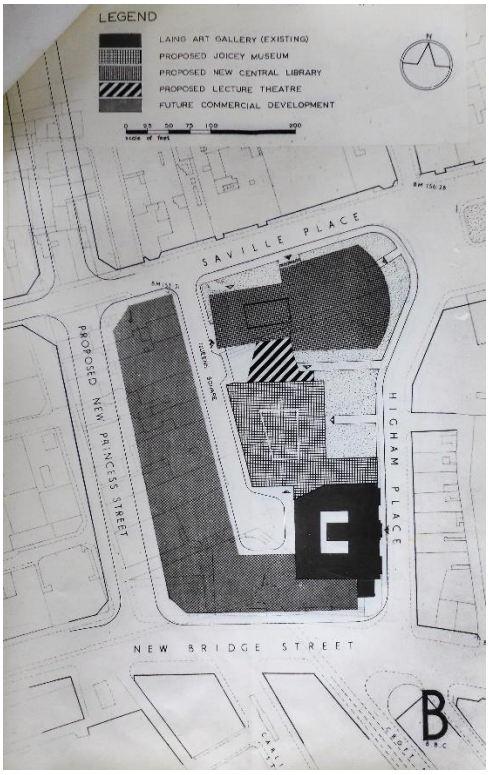


Fig. 21. Scheme B: modification of A, but with the Joicey back from Higham Place with a garden forecourt of 60'x120'. TWA T132-79.

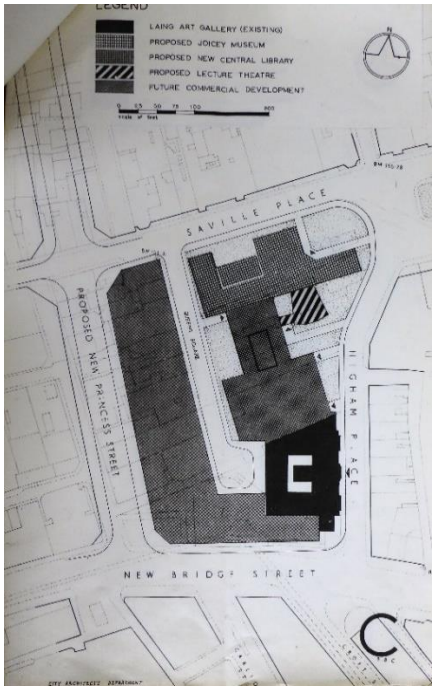


Fig. 22. Scheme C: The Joicey facing Saville Place and the Library placed between the Joicey and the Laing. This scheme reduced the amount of natural light received by the Library and precluded communication between the Joicey and the Laing. TWA T132-79.

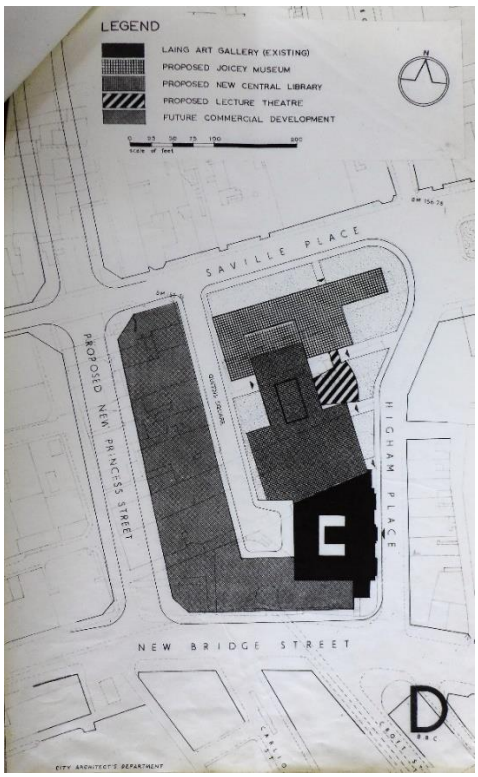


Fig. 23. Scheme D: It was similar to C, but had the Joicey set back 30’ from the footpath in Saville place and the service wing of the Library was dovetailed into the Joicey. The light conditions were better, but still insufficient. TWA T132-79.

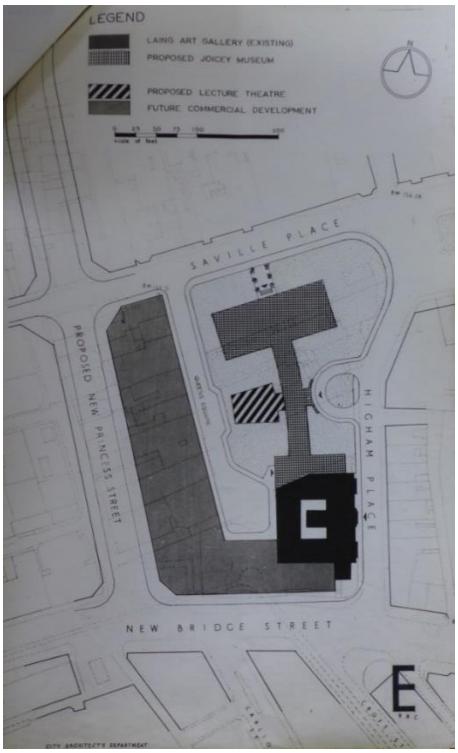


Fig. 24. Scheme E: No Library. TWA T132-79.

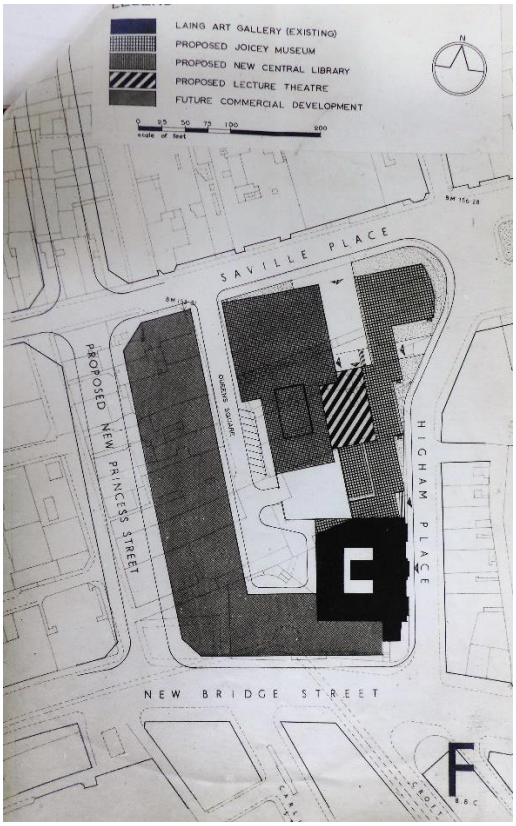


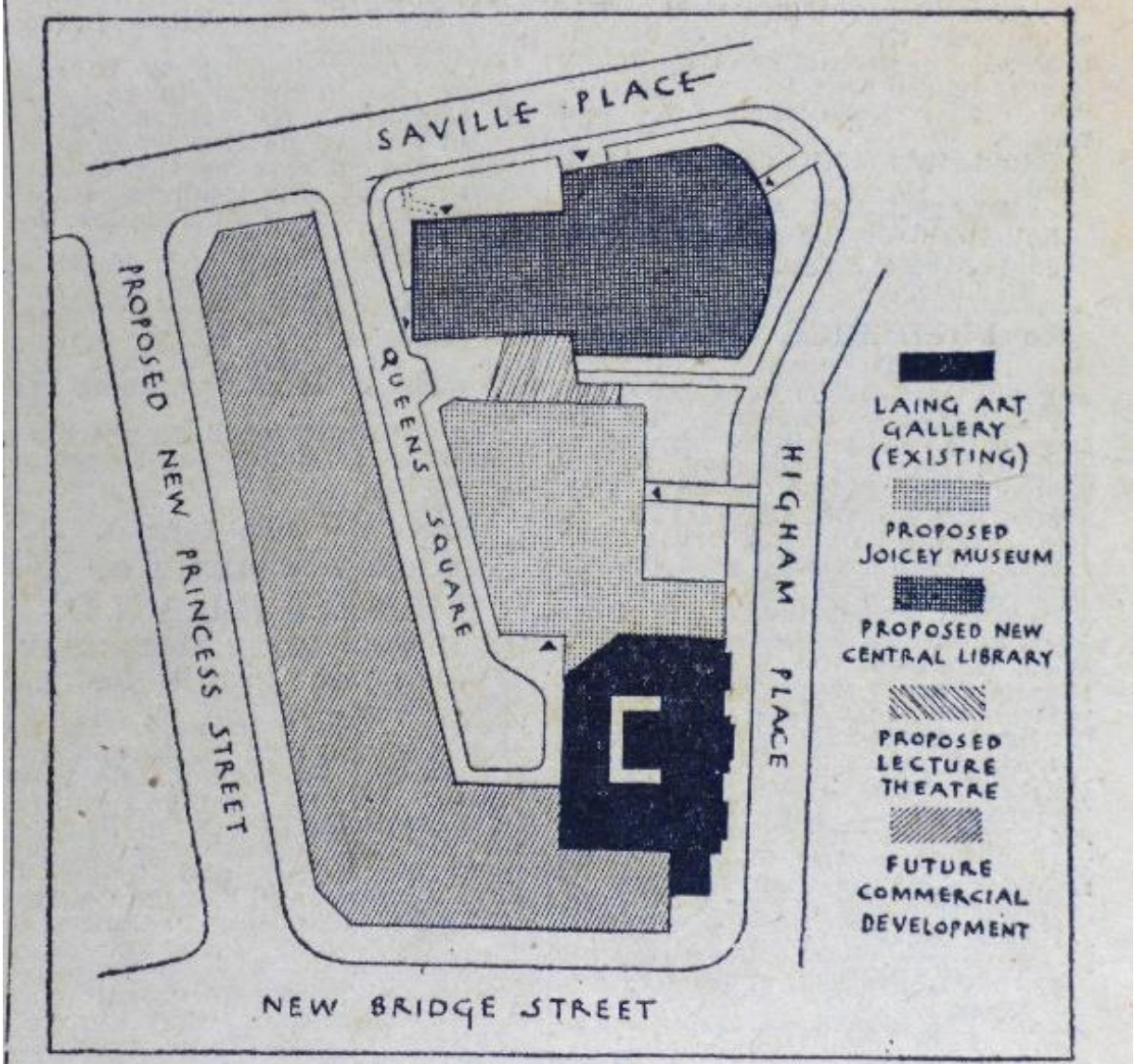
Fig. 25.Scheme F: Both the Library and the Joicey face Saville Place, and the Joicey is linked to the Laing. TWA T132-79.

story.

The rededication was to have been performed by the Bishop of Newcastle, Dr. Noel B. Hudson, but he had to cancel the engagement because he was recovering from laryngitis.

the land.

The Laing Art Gallery Committee, it is understood, have been unable to agree that the development as outlined would be in accordance with their best interests.



THIS plan shows the proposed central library as part of a new city cultural and shopping centre.

Fig. 26. 'New Library and Museum plan for the city'. *Journal & North Mail*. (23-04-1956)

at a cost of £8,000, with the addition of a children's library.[147] Actually, the unfair distribution of public funding between libraries and art galleries was not a local phenomenon, but the reflection of a global situation created after the approval of the Public Libraries Act, 1919, which had removed rate limitations on museum and library expenditure. The scheme, in practice, had provided little incentive for local authorities to increase funding to museums, so libraries became the main beneficiaries and most regional museums fell behind in both status and financial resources.[148]

CBS' 'ideal museum'

The over two years of planning work and debate between the Laing and the Library eventually became pointless when the Minister of Housing and Local Government refused the Town Planning Committee's proposal for the new Princess Street, giving the argument that it would 'remove car parks and cause traffic congestion.'[149] The final decisions regarding the Joicey Museum and the interventions ultimately developed with the money from the bequest will not be discussed here, as they took place after CBS' death, and therefore go beyond the period of study. However, although the curator did not achieve his most ambitious project for the Laing, his writings on the matter offer a significant account of what an experienced museum professional considered to be the needs of a British regional gallery in the 1950s, summarising how an ideal museum would have looked and the purposes it would have fulfilled.

CBS thoroughly listed all the elements missing at the Laing and which he expected to be added to the Joicey. Those included a combination of large and small exhibition rooms, a lecture theatre and concert room, office accommodation, an art reference library, a technical department for restoration, a workroom for framing pictures, a committee room, a staff cafeteria, two storage rooms big enough 'to accommodate the permanent collection when not on exhibition, and also reserve collections', a room for 'housing and administering the school museum collections', a

[147] Stevenson, C.B. (24-04-1956). Letter to Alderman William Temple. TWA T132-54.
[148] Black, A. (2000). *The Public Library in Britain, 1914-2000.* London: The British Library, p. 18-21.
[149] Anon. (28-11-1956). 'Minister says "no" to big city shopping scheme'. *Evening Chronicle*, n.p.

room for receptions, an information and Sales Bureau at the entrance hall, a staff Room and a lift for pictures.[150] The abundance of handwritten notes on the matter suggests detailed previous reflection and search for inspiration in other British regional galleries, whilst letters to Newcastle City Architect acknowledge that the focus of this research was the Laing building and its needs. When asking for a basement in the Joicey, CBS recognised that it would be used as a store room for the Laing.[151] The curator also admitted that he wanted the land between both buildings to be left empty in order to provide accommodation for a potential extension of the Laing. In 1955, the York Art Gallery had received the F.D. Lycett Green's collection, containing over a hundred continental Old Master paintings.[152] Perhaps in connection with it, CBS dreamt that the Laing would one day host paintings by 'Dutch, Italian or other foreign schools', thus evidencing that the British focus of the Laing's acquisition policy had been dictated mostly by financial reasons (see pp.201-210).[153]

The exhibition space at the Joicey museum was described as serving three purposes: firstly, hosting the Joicey Collection of Decorative and Industrial Art. Secondly, displaying a Local Historical Collection, on the lines of the London Museum, and including paintings, engravings, maps and local applied arts such as silver, Newcastle glass and Tyneside pottery. And thirdly, it would host the collection of painting and decorative art which could not be displayed at the Laing due to the lack of space. Its six galleries would be divided in the following way: one gallery for the Joicey collection, two galleries for the Local Historical Collection, and three galleries for the extension of the Laing, including one gallery for special exhibitions, which would be 'saving in wear and tear', avoiding the Laing's permanent collection to be taken down for every exhibition.[154] CBS hoped to release space in the Laing by transferring Joicey's collection to the new space, thus relieving congestion in the Laing's museum section and allowing the opportunity to display part of the collections in storage. In his writings, CBS insisted on the idea that 'Mr. Joicey's chief concern when deciding to make the donation had been to address the shortage of

[150] Stevenson, C.B. (12-04-1955). Report for the City Architect. TWA, T132-54.
[151] Stevenson, C.B. (29-06-1955) Letter to M. Roberts. TWA, T.132-54.
[152] Green, Richard (1991). *York City Art Gallery. An Illustrated Guide.* York City Council.
[153] Stevenson, C.B. (n.d.). TWA, T132-55.
[154] LCM 4-11-1955. TWA MD/NC/129/7, p.6.

space at the Gallery', as barely a third of the Laing's watercolour collection was on show in the 1950s, and 'the permanent collection would need a museum at least twice the size of the Laing'.[155]

Further aims of the Joicey Museum included its educational value 'for school children, students of history, public and designers and craftsmen who could find inspiration in the finest examples of Newcastle industrial arts', and the emotional connection to the local culture, in the hope that the better understanding of local history would stimulate a sense of civic pride through the recreation of a glorious past.[156] The emphasis on the museum's educational role, overly present in CBS' career, evidences the engagement with the proposals of the Markham Report.[157] Instead, the will of connection with the visitors' feelings was probably still imbued with the idea of service to the nation expanded in regional museums around the time of the Second World War.[158] In order to achieve both aims, CBS hoped on a grant from Newcastle Council that allowed the Laing to 'maintain a vital educational and cultural force in the life of the city.'[159] He considered his petition to be justified because 'so far the Corporation has not spent a penny on providing an art Gallery.'[160]

This last statement reveals CBS' awareness that, within the post-war context and the rise of building costs, Joicey's funding could not supply the total amount required for a modern extension, and that part of the cost would have to be covered by the Council. His last writings on the matter insisted on the importance of not rejecting Joicey's gift, 'otherwise it would set a dangerous precedent for the benefactors of the future, who would think twice before making a similar offer', a warning which recalls the arguments used in 1910 in connection to the Shipley issue.[161] Somehow, the end of CBS' period brings back the same appeal to 'civic pride' that had been claimed by the local elite in supporting the creation of the Laing at the turn of the century:

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[155] Ibid.
[156] TWA, T132-55.
[157] Markham, S.F. (1938). *A report on the Museums and Art Galleries of the British Isles (other than the National Museums) to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees*. Edinburgh: T&A Constable Ltd., p.83.
[158] Mackay, R (2002). *Half the Battle: Civilian morale in Britain during the Second World War*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
[159] TWA, T132-55.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.

> Few institutions have been more generously supported by the public than the present Art Gallery […]. Newcastle cannot ignore the need for a new and worthy building in which to house them, and one which would inspire further donations. If it reaches the high standard which the gifts demand, Newcastle would become a centre of arts and culture to which people would come in ever increasing numbers. A good museum is a valuable asset to a city and the cost of upkeep is more than balanced by the services it renders and the gifts it encourages.[162]

However, the curator's appeal did not achieve the same success in the 1950s. His systematic rejection of any option other than a Joicey museum created next to the Laing was seen as selfish, despite the reasoning that he would be retired before the museum was finished, and his assertions of acting only in defence of Joicey's will. Whether this is absolutely honest, or a result of CBS' love for the Laing, it is undeniable that, after the curator's death, neither the Council nor the trustees could hold his degree of commitment to the project or manage the circumstances with the same skill. The decisions to buy the period furniture that CBS had rejected and to open the Joicey Museum in the Holy Jesus Hospital soon proved to be wrong choices.

Conclusion

The chapter has offered an overview of the local context in which the Laing was born, highlighting how this context conditioned the development of the gallery. Special attention has been paid to Newcastle's cultural panorama at the turn of the century and its potential to delay the Laing's opening. The setbacks of the Laing's site and the deficiencies of its building have also been linked to the local circumstances. The management problems caused by these deficiencies and the attempts to remedy them have been described both in relation to local circumstances and in the wider context of the conditions of British regional galleries during the first half of the twentieth century. The chapter has concluded with a detailed analysis of the Joicey Bequest, which offers a reflection both about the impact of local idiosyncrasies in the failure of the project and about wider museological issues such as the facilities required by regional museums.

[162] Ibid.

CHAPTER 2: THE TIME

> 'The creation of new art museums was an erratic process shaped by competing bodies, the wishes of donors, and an uncertain notion of the museums' purpose.'[1]

By the end of the 1950s, Britain had a total of 879 museums, of which 569 were managed by local authorities.[2] Many of these institutions share with the Laing a common story of administrative confusion, political neglect and underfunding. Partially thanks to the regulatory and homogenizing influence exerted by the MA, regional galleries tended to deal with the historical circumstances of the first half of the twentieth century in related ways. But the Laing is unique amongst them in facing, as an added handicap, the extra duty of having to build its art collection from scratch.

This chapter responds to a double aim: firstly, it details the Laing's singular story, analysing how the historical context affected the creation and development of the gallery and how it impacted the growth of its permanent collection. Secondly, it presents the Laing as a more general case study of the ways in which small museums managed to cope with the rapid succession of world-changing circumstances taking place in a reduced timeframe. The gallery's evolution during its first fifty years has been connected, when possible, with wider cultural and museological issues, and with key historical events at a local, national or international level, such as the two World Wars, the Great Depression or the post-war period. The information is divided into five sections: **section A** describes the creation of the Laing in connection with the British arts scene, the art market and the legal framework regulating public art galleries in the Edwardian period, whilst **sections B-D** connect different milestones in the early years of the gallery with the history of Newcastle and Britain during the same period.

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[1] Waterfield, G. (2015). *The People's Galleries. Art, Museums and exhibitions in Britain, 1800-1914*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p.121.

[2] Teather, L. (1983). *Museology and its traditions: The British experience, 1845-1945* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Leicester, U.K., p.140.

A. ARTS IN THE EDWARDIAN ERA AND THE LAING'S GENESIS

The Laing was one of the seventy-two provincial museums established in Britain between 1900 and 1910, in that 'leisurely time when women wore picture hats and did not vote, when the rich were not ashamed to live conspicuously, and the sun really never set on the British flag.'[3] The boom of these institutions, which evidences the urban shift of British society (78% of whose population lived in towns by 1914) made them an essential ingredient in the intricate network of art commerce, together with dealers, art critics and commercial galleries.[4] The centre of this network was the city of London, with its art galleries and institutions, art schools and art publishing houses, and, especially, its commercial galleries 'with professional dealers and regularized exhibition spaces'.[5] As a consequence of the British economic growth over the period 1880-1914, London became one of the leading international art markets of the era, attracting a 'wealthy patronage class whose desire to possess art works was part of a larger culture of display.'[6] For regional galleries, the contact with this highly-centralised system was vital, as it provided access to auction houses and commercial galleries for purchases, allowed networking through the attendance of their curators at previews and exhibitions where artists, critics and museum directors could be met, and provided loans from national museums for temporary exhibitions in the provinces. Two factors conditioned the success of regional galleries in their relations with London: the ease of access (determined by the geographical distance from the capital) and the budget available for purchases. The Laing was disadvantaged in both aspects.

The Edwardian museums

The centrality of education within late Victorian justifications for public investment in art continued into Edwardian times, helping to keep a steady flow of art museums opening, coexisting alongside commercial galleries. The result was a dynamic

[3] Hynes, S. (1968). *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.4.
[4] Kavanagh, G. (1994). *Museums and the First World War. A social history.* London: Leicester University Press, p.8.
[5] Fletcher, P. and Helmreich, A. (2012). 'Local/Global: Mapping Nineteenth-Century London's Art Market.' *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide, 11* (3). Retrieved from http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/autumn12/fletcher-helmreich-mapping-the-london-art-market
[6] Fletcher, P. and Helmreich, A. (2011). *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850-1939*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.2.

atmosphere in which both systems fed each other, as museums provided education for the wider audiences and inspiration for the growing number of art students, whilst the market system both produced and made use of the experts working as curators and managers for public institutions. There was, however, an ideological shift underpinning the new Edwardian openings, as 'the ideal of a philanthropic Liberal-inspired gallery for the improvement of simple people' was replaced by a 'new egalitarianism' which moved away from the aim of 'training artists and artisans towards the non-vocational enjoyment of art for the public at large.'[7] This shift brought political implications because of its questioning of the Victorian conception of the museum as an element of status and power and its reconsideration of the ownership of museums, which the MA connected with the rise of democracy:

> Museums are now-a-days the most democratic and socialistic possessions of the people. All have equal access to them, peer and peasant receive the same privileges and treatment, each one contributes in direct proportion to his means to their maintenance, and each has a feeling of individual proprietorship.[8]

Locally, the discussions regarding the public utility of museums and their ownership feasibly influenced the Laing's late opening and its preference towards local art (for the Laing's policy, see pp.201-212). Globally, they ultimately led to a reconceptualization of museum design which took inspiration from American models, especially from the concept developed by Matthew Prichard (1865–1936), assistant director at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, who prioritised joy over knowledge, and who suggested displaying only a few objects, giving them ample space, and avoiding exhibiting reproductions, as the museum goal should not be to provide an art historical education or serve the needs of the scholars but to offer an aesthetic experience.[9] The ideas, which arrived in Britain as a result of Roger Fry's visit to Boston in 1905, being spread through Frank J. Mayer's article in *The Burlington Magazine*, had only a small impact on the early Laing, which struggled with the lack of exhibition space and with the responsibility of being the main institution for the public display of art for Newcastle population. CBS' interest for this new way of curating - evidenced in his attempts to present a less crowded space for the

[7] Ibid as 1, p.300.
[8] Howarth, E., ed. (1902). 'General notes.' *Museums Journal*, vol. 2 (n.3), p.76.
[9] Hoberman, R. (2011). *Museum Trouble: Edwardian Fiction and the Emergence of Modernism*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

enjoyment of the permanent collection - often collided with the need to offer opportunities to as many local artists as possible, especially in the context of the annual Northern Counties exhibitions, thus leading to a seasonal alternance between 'modern' and 'old-fashioned' curating styles in the same space and under the same management (figs.1 and 2, and chapter 4).

A further element affecting the collecting policies of Edwardian museums was the growing impact of the international art market. Increased demand for artworks for exportation caused their prices to rise, making them inaccessible for many provincial galleries. National pride ultimately led to the creation of the National Art Collections Fund (NACF, 1903), aimed to 'save' artworks from private commercial exchange by transforming them into public goods.[10] This initiative, which could have been life-changing for the financially deprived regional galleries, however mostly benefited the national museums: the Laing, for instance, could only join the scheme in 1929. Instead, more modest funds, such as the Northern Art Collections Fund and the Contemporary Art Society, had a greater impact on the gallery's collection (see pp.231-233 and 278).

The legal framework and the Laing's first steps

As in many regional galleries, the Laing's creation and development was connected to the evolution of the local library. Although - differently from other British cities – in Newcastle these institutions did not share premises, they were funded through the same Penny Rate which, since the promulgation of the Museums Act (1846) and Museums and Public Libraries Acts (1850 and 1855), allowed municipal boroughs over 10,000 inhabitants to levy a rate of up to halfpenny in the pound to create municipal libraries and art galleries. As mentioned in chapter 1, this arrangement subordinated the galleries to libraries, a problem conditioning the Laing's management on several occasions (see pp.178).[11] The new powers also allowed local authorities to provide accommodation for the collections of learned societies, which by the second half of the nineteenth century were losing their momentum, thus

[10] For an overview of the issue, see op.cit. (note 6).
[11] Watson, F. (1939). *Art Lies Bleeding.* London: Chatto & Windus, pp.104-5.

Figs.1 and 2: Laing's gallery A exhibiting the permanent collection in the early years (up) and the Northern Counties' exhibition in 1934 (down). Stevenson, C.B. (1955) *The creation of an art gallery: the history of the Laing Art Gallery and the creation of its permanent collections since the opening in 1904*, and *Sunday Sun* (29-06-1934).

leading to the museum boom of the 1880s and 1890s.[12] But the Laing's situation was – as discussed in chapter 1 – different both in timing and in collections, and so was the birth of Newcastle's library. Because the establishment of the Library Rate was not compulsory, Newcastle did not join the scheme until 1876, at a time in which more than 75 British cities had already established free libraries.[13] Probably, the delay was – as usual in Newcastle – connected to ratepaying, as 1,100 signatories had complained against the initiative, setting a precedent which may have also contributed to delaying the creation of an art gallery.[14]

Financial considerations were prominent in the speeches pronounced at the historic meeting for the promotion of a public art gallery in Newcastle (1899), probably orchestrated by Mayor George Harkus and featuring councillors, local peers, businessmen and the artists Ralph Hedley, Robert Jobling (1841-1923) and Thomas Dickinson. Harkus' contemporaries described the Mayor's efforts together with his ignorance regarding the art market:

> Though he really knew very little about pictures, nobody could have been more in earnest about an art gallery than Mr. George Harkus. […]. To Robert Spence Watson he revealed the fact that somebody had offered him a thousand pounds towards the purchase of pictures. 'You could buy a lot of good pictures with a thousand pounds', he observed.[15]

Alderman Stephenson's support of Harkus' proposal did not highlight the usefulness of public art galleries, but instead focused on its potential contribution towards civic prestige, stating that the opening of this institution could be used to commemorate Newcastle's 500th anniversary. He declared that an art gallery had for a long time been wanted, and that it was a good moment to achieve it, 'as trade was so brisk and there was plenty of money all around.'[16] Regarding costs, Stephenson dismissed the possibility of public funding and encouraged private benefaction, in the belief that, as the Council could provide a site in Higham Place, only £15,000 or £20,000 would be needed. He concluded that, if every one of the 700 signatories of the petition for an art gallery put forward £25, the goal would be reached. Hedley

[12] Ibid as 4, p.13.
[13] Harris, M.H. (1984). *The History of Libraries in the Western World*. London: Scarecrow Press, p.153
[14] NCR 02-03-1874, p.78.
[15] Watson, A. (23-03-1922). 'Recollections of men and events on Tyneside'. *Shields Gazette,* n.p.
[16] Anon (13-10-1899). 'Projected Art Gallery in Newcastle'. *Evening Chronicle,* p.4a.

recalled that the Reference Library had originally been designed to be an art gallery, whilst Alderman Newton, chairman of the Public Libraries Committee, promised to harmonize the association of Literature and Art. The meeting concluded with the election of a large and influential Committee including members of the local elite like Lord Armstrong, A.H.G. Grey - the 4th Earl Grey (1851-1917), Sir James Joicey, the engineer and shipbuilder Sir B.C. Browne (1839-1917) and Joseph Cowen. The money collection started at this same moment: Alderman Stephenson offered 500 guineas if the scheme was entirely carried out, the Conservative politician Sir C.F. Hamond (1817-1905) donated £100, Alderman Newton offered £20, the shipowner and Liberal M.P. T.A. Cairns (1854-1908) £100, and Hedley £20 – totalling £765. The civic status of those first committee members and donors is comparable to that of the founders of many British regional galleries. But in the Newcastle case, their donations did not trigger a groundswell: when Alexander Laing's offer reached the Council, four months later, only £1,200 had been collected so far.[17]

B. THE FIRST WORLD WAR AT THE LAING

The period comprised between the endowment of the Laing in 1900 and the beginning of the First World War has not been chronologically dealt with in this chapter but analysed separately: the management complexities brought by the lack of a collection, the intricated composition of the Laing Committee and the consequences of the Laing's initial financial debt are explored in chapter 3. The first relevant purchasing fund (the Glover Fund, received in 1905), its implications for the promotion of local art and its connexion to the annual Northern Counties exhibitions are analysed in connection with the first purchases and donations in chapter 4. The failed Shipley Bequest (1909), has become the subject of a separate article.[18] Therefore, this chronological account of the Laing's history begins with the gallery's tenth birthday at the outbreak of the First World War.

At that early moment, the Laing was brimming with vitality, although it also faced significant funding problems, still lacked a collection and had many operating

[17] NCR 07-02-1900, p.153.
[18] Anguix, L. (forthcoming) '"A collection of mere travesties of time-honoured originals." The rejection of the Shipley Bequest'. *Journal of the History of Collections.*

routines yet to be developed. Despite the initial efforts to keep the gallery running normally, the war significantly altered the programming and content of the exhibitions, making it difficult to transport artworks and influencing decision-making. This section analyses the changes introduced by the war and their impact on the development of the Laing as an institution, comparing them, when possible, with similar vicissitudes experienced by other British regional galleries. It also shows the Committee's determination to keep the gallery open, and to continue, despite the difficulties, to build its collection. Moreover, it places the wartime exhibitions within their historical context, highlighting how they helped to sustain up the population's morale and how they contributed to the war effort through the dissemination of patriotic messages.

The first effects of the war

Because the Laing's exhibitions were organised in advance, the gallery routine was not immediately affected by the outbreak of the war. The Committee meeting held on the 31 July 1914, just five days before Britain declared war on Germany, only reflected upon the exhibition of works by Artists of the Northern Counties, which had opened three weeks earlier.[19] Joicey's enthusiasm for the Laing was at its height, with new loans and gifts arriving nearly every month, and as a token of gratitude, the Committee proposed him as a member.[20] The September meeting seemed relatively normal, too, dealing with the rearrangement of the galleries after the end of the Exhibition of the Northern Counties and the first preparations for the Special Autumn Exhibition, which would bring modern pictures loaned by the Tate, the RA and the National Gallery.[21] Unlike other regional galleries, no special measures were taken to protect the gallery building or its artworks.[22] Only the debate around Armstrong College's proposal to use the gallery D for its lessons reminds us that the Art School had in the meantime been taken over by the Military Authorities to become a war hospital (fig.3). This was the closest the Laing got to a take-over, unlike other

[19] Anon. (29-07-1914). 'Sculpture and Caricature. Clever work on view in the Newcastle Art Gallery'. *Northern Echo,* n.p.
[20] LCM 31-07-1914. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.55.
[21] LCM 25-09-1914. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.63.
[22] Protective measures against art attacks were thoroughly discussed by museum curators through the *Museum Journal.* See, for instance: W.R. Butterfield, ed. (1915). *Museums Journal*, vol. 15.

regional galleries, such as the Walker Art Gallery or the Birmingham Museum, which were used by the Food Controllers, or the Ferens Art Gallery, in Hull, which became a military hospital.[23]

However, the first difficulties for the arrangement of exhibitions at the Laing were not long in coming. The annual Autumn Exhibition was the first to suffer delays because of the military occupation of the railway lines, this time due to the mobilisation of the Tyneside Scottish and Tyneside Irish regiments. An incomplete preview was finally held on the 20 November 1914, of which critics highlighted the extraordinary effort undertaken, 'more especially during the present crisis, when owners are reluctant to part with their treasures of art.'[24] As the *Daily Chronicle* remarked, 'such an exhibition at this moment is exceedingly difficult to accomplish, but should nothing more arrive than was already hung this morning, Mr. C.B. Stevenson will have achieved another triumph.'[25] That over 12,000 visited the exhibition confirms this statement.[26] Indeed, visitor figures both for the Laing and in general for British provincial museums exceeded expectations throughout the war, reaching about twelve million per year, according to the MA, evidencing both the public attachment to these institutions and their capacity to fulfill people's needs.[27]

In 1915, the Laing started to encounter interferences in management aspects. The first example was a petition of financial support towards the Arts Fund, which included the suggestion to charge an admission fee to private views.[28] This would have meant a drastic change for the Laing's usual policy regarding private views, which were used to honour prominent visitors, or to invite critics who would later write reviews in newspapers, providing valuable publicity for the exhibitions. Secondly, the *Evening Chronicle* complained that the Laing had exceeded the authorized expenditure by £259.[29] Although the annual estimates had already been cut down due to war circumstances, the Committee adjusted them further to avoid criticism, whilst having to add special insurance for war risks after the expiration of

[23] W.R. Butterfield, ed. (1918). *Museums Journal*, vol. 18, p.91-92.
[24] Anon. (24-12-1914). 'Frank Brangwyn's Art'. *North Mail,* n.p.
[25] Anon. (20-11-1914). 'Modern Pictures. Exhibition at Laing Art Gallery.' *Daily Chronicle,* n.p.
[26] LCM 26-02-1915. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.81.
[27] Lewis, G. (1989). *For Instruction and Recreation. A centenary History of the Museums Association.* London: Quiller Press, p.29.
[28] Ibid as 26.
[29] Anon. (28-01-1915). 'Laing Art Gallery. Cost of upkeep over £3.000 a year.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

Fig.3. Armstrong College as a War Hospital (c.1915) TWA.

the Government scheme against damage by aircraft.[30] The origin of the complaints may have been the call for savings issued by the newly appointed Retrenchment Committee, which played an important role in campaigning for the closure of public galleries during wartime, with the aim of saving costs. Although the idea was vehemently contested by the MA, which gathered 800 signatures for a petition in less than two days, locally voices continued to be heard calling for the closure of the Laing throughout the war.[31]

Joicey and the 'Old Newcastle' exhibition

Despite the difficulties, 1915 was a fortunate year for the Laing's permanent collection: Higginbottom made an important loan of Japanese artworks (comprising arms, bronzes, ivories, lacquer, porcelain, pottery, prints and drawings) which became a donation later on, and CBS wrote both his *Report on the Policy for the Creation of a Permanent Collection* and his first *Catalogue of Permanent Collection of Pictures in Oil and Watercolours*. The indefatigable curator also proposed continuing the purchase of watercolours, something which was postponed because the Committee member Percy Corder (1863-1927), who had been entrusted to help in the selection, refused to do so, claiming that 'I do not think it is right at a time like the present that public money should be spent in the purchase of pictures.'[32] Corder was probably following the Government's positioning, as purchase grants for national museums had been suspended from April 1915.[33]

The greatest wartime contribution to the Laing collections came through John G. Joicey, whose plans to fund a local history museum in Newcastle were preceded by his proposal to arrange an 'Old Newcastle' exhibition which would serve as a 'taster' for the potential museum. A newspaper call asking collectors to contribute loans brought 700 works, comprising 196 paintings, 329 etchings and 227 objects, despite 'considerable delay owing to the difficulty of obtaining conveyances.'[34] John's powerful uncle, Lord Joicey, unveiled the model of Newcastle in Elizabethan times

[30] LCM 30-07-1915. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.105.
[31] Ibid as 27.
[32] LCM 29-10-1915. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.119.
[33] Ibid as 4, p.97.
[34] Ibid as 32, p.120.

commissioned by his nephew as the central event of a crowded opening ceremony. The collector then sent a letter to the Mayor with a proposal to make the exhibition permanent, adding fifty guineas to create a fund for a permanent local collection, a scheme supported by the Laing's Committee member T. Edward Hodgkin with another ten guineas.[35] 'The admirable collection of the Pre-Graingerite Newcastle arranged by the Curator under extreme difficulties' was a resounding success, praised in dozens of articles in the local press.[36] It was extended for almost five months, and visited by over 40,000 people, with more than 6,000 children and a significant number of soldiers and sailors, thus evidencing the usefulness of museums as providers of leisure for armed forces, defended by the MA.[37] For the Laing, the most immediate consequence was a renewed interest in making donations of local art and objects: indeed, many of the loans were gifted to the gallery after the closure of the show. Additionally, Joicey and Hodgkin's donations were used to purchase artworks of local historical interest, in the middle of a public clamour to make the exhibition permanent, which was obviously very beneficial for the Laing.[38] The gallery proved its usefulness at a social level, and managed to silence the criticisms for being open whilst the museums in London were closed, and the letters asking 'whether the Laing Art Gallery is worth the sixty odd pounds a week which it costs?'[39]

However, the curation of 'Old Newcastle' was deeply rooted within its wartime context through the prominent role given to objects related to the city's military past and the timely use of patriotic values. Indeed, the Government had just introduced conscription on 24 January 1916, and the battle of Verdun was at its height. It is therefore debatable whether 'Old Newcastle' would have aroused the same media interest and the same engagement with audiences had it been held in peacetime.

[35] Stevenson, C.B. (1947) 'Report of the Curator outlining the History and circumstances of the Joicey Bequest.' TWA, T.132-54.
[36] LCM 31-12-1915. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.124.
[37] Ibid as 27.
[38] Anon. (05-04-1916). 'Why not permanent?' *North Mail,* n.p.
[39] Duke, H. (24-02-1916). 'The Laing Art Gallery and its cost'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

The war reaches local art

After the closure of 'Old Newcastle', the remaining months of 1916 were a period of relative calm in the Laing Committee's activity, probably because the Chairman - Colonel Johnstone Wallace – was absent with the Tyneside Irish Brigade at the Front, so the meetings were rescheduled to happen bi-monthly instead of monthly, an alteration in the routine which continued until January 1919.[40] CBS – who was 42 years old in 1916 – avoided conscription, unlike other curators, such as Frederick Kenyon, Director of the British Museum, who was 51 in 1914 but went immediately into war service, or E. Leonard Gill, curator of the Hancock Museum, who was replaced by his father Joseph J. Gill, but who continued sending instructions 'amidst the roar of big guns a little behind the firing line'.[41] Feasibly, the Laing Committee appealed for CBS to be exempted from war service - as happened to E.E. Lowe, Curator at Leicester Museum, who was 37 in 1914 - although the minutes do not confirm this.[42]

Financially, the Laing's annual estimates of Expenditure (£3,480) and Income (£120) again suffered significant cuts for loans (from £40 to £20), fittings and frames (from £180 to £150) and, especially, purchases (from £696 to £146). Nonetheless, the situation was better than that experienced by other regional galleries such as Newport, which was considering closure for economic reasons.[43] After resolving the estimates, efforts focused on the arrangement of the 10th Northern Counties exhibition, which for the first time since its creation had missed its annual appointment (see pp.246-270). This situation was common amongst temporary exhibitions in wartime: for instance, the Autumn Exhibitions at the Walker were cancelled in 1917 and 1918, after suffering heavy financial losses the two previous years.[44] Nevertheless, the Laing's Northern Counties Exhibition of 1916 was as popular as usual, receiving 18,702 visitors, although the sale of pictures was not high, and, unusually, the Committee decided not to spend the Glover Fund on purchasing any works exhibited that year.[45] The critics were aware of the changes in

[40] LCM 31-03-1916. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.135.
[41] Butterfield, W.R. ed. (1918). *Museums Journal*, vol.18, p.16.
[42] Ibid as 4, p.54.
[43] Ibid as 27.
[44] Morris, E. and Stevens, T. (2013). *The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1873-2000*. Bristol: Sanson & Co., p.26.
[45] Ibid.

the subjects and techniques displayed, such as the increase in the number of etchings, related to the war prohibition of sketching in the open.[46] Also, the usual local landscapes and portraits gave way to more dramatic themes, with artists trying to capture the concerns of society. Scattered between war-related works, the more traditional subjects of 'some artists who have got their inspiration from tranquil nature and spring […] provide a restful interlude to the mind made unrestful by the period.'[47] The effort made by the curator to 'gather together a capital group of Northern paintings despite a depleted staff' was highlighted, as well as the *Charge of Lancers at St. Quentin* (1915), by the local artist John Charlton (1849–1917) whose success may be partially related with the fact that the painter's two sons had just been killed at the Front, a circumstance that probably also influenced the Laing's decision to arrange a Charlton exhibition shortly later.[48]

Wartime exhibitions

The Laing's circumstances kept worsening during the two following years, as the effects of war deepened throughout British society. Of the nine temporary exhibitions held between 1917 and 1918, only two did not have an explicit war connection. Budget cuts continued, as so did voices calling for the closure of the gallery, and the Northern Counties exhibition had to be postponed for the second time in its history.

1917 started with the Chairman still away from the Laing, this time because he had been appointed Deputy Director of the National Service in London. The Council approved the gallery's annual estimates in extremis after Alderman Fitzgerald had moved an amendment that in the national interest the Laing should be closed, a proposal which had been applauded in letters published by the *Evening Chronicle.*[49] The John Charlton exhibition, opened in February, was one of the few in this period that could be freely chosen by the Laing Committee. Bringing together over 150 works in oil, watercolour and pastel, one wonders how such large canvases as *The Funeral of Queen Victoria* (n.d.) managed to reach the gallery. Although the studies of dogs and horses had always been the most outstanding aspect of Charlton's

[46] Anon. (09-06-1916). 'Northern Art'. *North Mail,* n.p.
[47] Anon. (10-06-1916). 'Art Contrasts'. *North Star,* n.p.
[48] Anon. (10-06-1916). 'Art Exhibition'. *Northern Echo,* n.p.
[49] 'Bugle-Nosed Jack'. (13-03-1917). 'The Estimates for Newcastle parks.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

work, the public and critics' interest gravitated towards the war pieces on show, especially the portraits of the artists' two sons, both Northumbrian Fusiliers, killed in action within a week of each other, and which probably had not been selected by chance.[50] The success of the exhibition - visited by over 44,000 people - or perhaps the artist's death later that year may explain why the Laing decided to invest 200 guineas of the reduced annual budget for purchases in Charlton's *Abandoned* (n.d.).[51]

The closure of the Charlton exhibition was followed by a series of six shows, lasting nearly until the end of the war, which had common features and varied greatly from the Laing's usual curatorial policy. None of those exhibitions was directly arranged by the gallery, and most did not feature any art-related content, insisting instead on war-related aspects and aiming to serve as patriotic propaganda and to raise funds. However, all of them were successful in terms of visitors, partly because of the promotion and support received from local and national authorities. The first was the Exhibition of Canadian Official War Photographs (March 1917), arranged by the Canadian War Records Office. The Office had been founded in 1916 by Sir Max Aitken, who later became Minister of Information, which would explain the relevance that the Newcastle Council gave to this touring exhibition[52] The Lord Mayor - Councillor G. Lunn - presided its opening, using the occasion as an opportunity to present several military decorations. The abundant press reviews gave graphic descriptions of how 'the shells were exploding in most inconvenient proximity to the camera.'[53] However, the Laing Committee's decision to have the Sheriff and Committee member Councillor A. Munro Sutherland (1867-1953) unveil his recent donation to the gallery, *Hazel in Black and Gold* (1916), by John Lavery (1856-1941) during the opening ceremony, was significant. Not only did this give the painting publicity in the press reviews, but it also served to remind the public that, despite the situation, the Laing remained primarily an art gallery. The Sheriff's speech seemed to insist on this idea when he expressed the hope that 'as art is primarily an expression of happiness, the Laing Art Gallery, which is open freely to rich and poor alike, will be

[50] Anon. (19-02-1917). 'Pictures by Mr. John Charlton.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[51] LCM 28-09-1917. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.183.
[52] Ibid as 4, p.120.
[53] Anon. (15-03-1917). 'Laing Gallery and Museum. Canadian Official War Photographs'. *Daily Journal,* n.p.

made more use of in order to wean our thoughts and passions to higher ideals of beauty and peace.'[54]

The next exhibition on the schedule (May 1917) dealt with Russian life and history and had an admission charge in aid of the Russian Prisoners of War Help Committee. The Laing's Committee's lack of enthusiasm is evidenced in the request that this kind of exhibition would not form a precedent, although it is likely that the event was somewhat dependent upon Lord Armstrong's influence in the Laing Committee, as his shipyard had recently constructed the Russian icebreaker Svyatogor.[55] Three more war-related exhibitions followed: the first one (June) featured Muirhead Bone's drawings of the Western front, whilst the second (July) exemplified the role played by women in the war industries. Commissioned by the Ministry of Munitions, it was an enlarged version of those already held in London, Leeds, Bristol and Cardiff, showing over 2,000 examples of work made, and photographs of the women building engines for aircraft and motor-cars, tanks, guns and gun components.[56] But the main attraction for the Novocastrians were the images of the famous 'Munitionettes' working for Armstrong's factory: in some cases, 'educated women' who volunteered during the weekends.[57] Dozens of reviews in the local press emphasized the role of women in keeping British industries alive, or, in Mayor Lunn's words - once again present to support the opening – 'the power of womanhood, for women had come to the rescue of their country in office, shop, bank, factory and farm.'[58] Lest the Mayor's speech sound too empowering in a context in which the women's right to vote was about to become a reality, Councillor Wallace hastened to clarify that 'the object of dilution [sic] was not to displace men, but to supplement men's work. And when men come back after the war, women will not obstruct them in their work.'[59] 1917 ended with another Government-commissioned touring collection, 'The first Inter-Ally Exhibition of War Photographs', organized by the Exhibition Department of the British War Office.[60]

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[54] Anon. (21-03-1917). 'Canadian War Pictures'. *North Mail,* n.p.
[55] LCM 23-02-1917. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.169.
[56] For an overview of the contemporary reception of exhibitions on the topic of women's wartime work, check Mercer, A. (2013) 'The Changing Face of Exhibiting Women's Wartime Work at the Imperial War Museum'. *Women's History Review*, 22:2, 330-344.
[57] LCM 28-09-1917. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.183.
[58] Anon. (26-07-1917). 'What women can do'. *North Mail,* n.p.
[59] Anon. (26-07-1917). 'Women's war work exhibition'. *Daily Chronicle,* n.p.
[60] LCM 28-09-1917. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.183.

The positive side of the propaganda that dominated 1917 was that CBS had the time to undertake two work trips which allowed him to meet fellow curators, artists and collectors, and to secure loans for peacetime. In May, he went to London to attend the private views at the RA and Royal Watercolour Society, to meet Joicey, and also to obtain information on the formation of Local War Museums, managing to join the Committee in representation of Tyneside, as each county had been planned to have an individual organization, and the whole scheme was to be worked out in co-operation with the National War Museum.[61] In October, he travelled to Sheffield to attend the MA Conference, where he talked about local industrial objects in the Laing's museum collections, in connection with the discussion regarding industrial reorganization after the war.[62] He also participated in the debate about the formation of War Museums, which had been approved by the Government with the promise to secure material for them through a National Scheme. CBS suggested a simplified model of that scheme, with each municipality concentrating upon matters of local interest: Newcastle, for instance, could collect materials relating to the Northumberland fusiliers, the Tyneside Scottish and Irish, the Piper Fife and their role in the Battle of the Somme. Models of locally built arms and vehicles, together with drawings by war artists like Muirhead Bone and the governmental collections of war photographs would, in CBS' opinion, complete the collection, thus evidencing the curator's ability to take advantage of the unfavourable wartime context to improve museum heritage in Tyneside.

1918 was similar in terms of war propaganda exhibitions. However, two art exhibitions were held unrelated to the war. The first one arrived as a consequence of the arrangements made on CBS' visit to London, and consisted of over 300 pictures coming from the Tate Gallery through the Chantrey Bequest, curated as two different exhibitions in galleries A (showing oils by D. Farquharson and J. Farquharson, M. Fisher and John Everett Millais) and B (with watercolours by John Surtees).[63] The critics saw Surtees as 'a stimulating example to the youth of to-day', who, 'after twelve hours labour daily at Stephenson's works, spent his evening hours at the

[61] LCM 25-05-1917. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.176.
[62] Stevenson, C.B. (1917). 'Report on the Sheffield Conference'. LCM 30-11-1917. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.187.
[63] Anon. (25-01-1918). 'Loan at Laing Art Gallery'. *North Mail,* n.p.

classes of the Society for the promotion of the fine Arts.'[64] They also praised the curator's task of 'introducing to the North-country its own famous artists, known previously to the average citizen by their name rather than by their work.'[65] During a short break, it seemed as if the Laing was back to its pre-war life: 10,000 people visited the exhibitions within the first week, and CBS even gave a lecture on the 'Rise and Progress of the British School of Painting' at the Lit & Phil.[66] Unlike in the previous year, in 1918 the war did not impede the celebration of the 11th Northern Counties exhibition, which reached almost pre-war figures of sales and visitors (see pp.246-270), despite displaying fewer pictures than in previous years, probably because fewer artists were working at that moment.[67]

The annual visit to London dealt again with local war museums. Besides applying for gifts related to the Northumberland Fusiliers through the National War Museums scheme, CBS visited an exhibition of craft work done by disabled soldiers, which gave him the idea of obtaining for the Laing some of those examples together with tools and explanatory labels, in order to give new ideas to the large number of disabled men who were visiting the Laing in that period. He connected the idea to related work already being done by Armstrong College and the 'Cowen Homes' 'in helping restore these men to industrial life as productive citizens'.[68] The scheme was actually part of a global campaign for the provision of handicraft training for disabled veterans started in 1917 by Henry Wilson and members of the Arts and Crafts Movement, of which CBS was probably aware.[69] But it is also possible that the curator's empathy towards disabled soldiers went beyond the professional concern, connecting with his own personal circumstances, as the year before, his son Trevor had developed a heart condition because of complications derived from the mumps virus acquired while training with the Durham O.T.C., and which left him unfit for the Army.[70]

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[64] Anon. (25-01-1918). *North Star,* n.p.
[65] Anon. (17-01-1918). 'North-Country Artist'. *North Mail,* n.p.
[66] Anon. (05-02-1918). 'Lit. and Phil lecture'. *Daily Journal,* n.p.
[67] LCM 27-09-1918. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.209.
[68] LCM 31-05-1918. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.204.
[69] Malone, C. (2013) 'A job fit for heroes? Disabled veterans, the Arts and Crafts Movement and social reconstruction in post-World War I Britain'. *First World War Studies*, 4:2, 201-217.
[70] Stevenson, L. (1918). Memoirs, p.94. MSA.

1918 ended with the last of the institutionally commissioned war exhibitions, displaying on this occasion British Official Coloured War Photographs, sent by the Ministry of Information with the request to 'have it opened by a prominent local citizen, preferably the Lord Mayor', thus confirming the Government's pressures for art galleries to help in the war efforts.[71] Perhaps because of the excitement about the proximity of the victory, the feedback was excellent, reaching 18,000 visits and impressive proceeds of £530 from the sale of photographic reproductions.[72] The press reviews again described enthusiastically 'the tanks in action, the bursting of high explosives and shrapnel, and the general havoc wrought by the Hun.'[73] But there were also expressions of disappointment, questioning 'whether these periodical temporary exhibitions are really serving the cause of art, or giving the best value to the public, or fulfilling the purpose for which we might imagine the Art Gallery was built', and comparisons were made with the Shipley Art Gallery, which instead of displaying war-related topics had had its permanent collection on show since its opening the previous year.[74] Quite possibly, the Laing Committee agreed with this last opinion (which implied a defence of the educational aim of art galleries), because after the exhibition ended, all efforts were put into avoiding any other war-related events.

A swift return to peacetime routines

The end of hostilities in November 1918 brought to the Laing a trail of memorabilia in the form of donations of disparate interest coming from various sources, such as the canvas *Follow the Drum,* by Frank Dadd (1851–1929), given through the Lord Mayor's war relief fund, a collection of bag pipes of the Tyneside Irish rescued from the Somme battlefield, and the captured German Trophies offered by the War Office Trophies Committee.[75] But the Laing Committee seemed eager to resume its pre-war routines, and the decisions regarding the proposals of war-related exhibitions were dismissed with various excuses. For instance, the proposed exhibition of War

[71] Letter from the Ministry of Information (18-09-1918). TWA, MD.NC/129/3
[72] LCM 28-11-1918. TW, MD.NC/129/3, p.213.
[73] Anon. (11-10-1918). 'Battle Photographs'. *Newcastle Daily Journal and Courant,* n.p.
[74] Codling, W. (09-11-1918). 'The Laing Art Gallery: a Criticism'. *Weekly Chronicle,* n.p.
[75] LCM 27-09-1918. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.209.

Trophies, Photographs, Posters and Objects suggested by the Committee of the Imperial War Museum, was first delayed with the aim 'to obtain further information' and then advised against as other large towns had also rejected the offer and, in CBS' words, 'there are difficulties regarding to clearance which would have to be effected in the Museum Court.'[76] When the Imperial War Museum insisted, offering to cover the expenses of the exhibition, the Chairman appointed CBS to visit a similar exhibition to be held in Edinburgh or Glasgow.[77] Perhaps this new research had the aim of further postponing the decision until the urge to commemorate the victory slowly dissipated, because there are no records of this visit being held, and no more comments about the proposal were made in the following Committee meetings, which by the beginning of 1919 went back to its usual monthly occurrence. Other war-related proposals were more easily rejected, like the idea of an exhibition of records from the Newcastle War Information Office (March 1919), the offer of another exhibition of Canadian War Photographs (June 1919), the suggestion to store the charcoal from the Peace Bonfire of the Town Moor (July 1919), or to exhibit the War Trophies presented to the Corporation (February 1920).

Instead, and similarly to most British galleries, which considered that the wartime activities were 'one-off initiatives, to which there was no need to return', the Laing put energies into going back to its pre-war functioning as fast as possible.[78] This lack of interest towards keeping war objects contrasts with an interest on the plans for the formation of local War Museums, perhaps motivated by the Government's offer of funding for them.[79] Nevertheless, it was soon acknowledged that the cost of equipping and maintaining war museums would be unbearable for local authorities, so the idea was discarded in favour of commemoration through war memorials.[80] For Newcastle, the proposal was materialized in the creation of the Eldon Square monument, in which the Laing was actively involved.

Regarding the permanent collection, 1919 brought three almost simultaneous events: the first two were the arrival of the Joicey Bequest, and the donation of the

[76] LCM 28-11-1918. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.215.
[77] LCM 31-01-1919. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.217.
[78] Ibid as 4, p.160.
[79] Stevenson, C.B. (06-1919) Report of the Curator regarding the visit to London. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.236.
[80] Ibid as 4, p.113.

Higginbottom Japanese Collection hitherto on loan. Regarding his motivations for the gift, Higgibbottom explained that 'in the first place, these things are presented as an expression of deep gratitude for my son's safe return from the Great War, and in the second place, to mark my appreciation of the development of the art gallery and museum, as one of the great educational institutions of our city.'[81] Indeed, art collections were a frequent post-war thanks-giving offer: a similar example can be Sir William Gray's endowment of an art gallery for Hartlepool in 1920.[82]

To complete the good news for the Laing, the whole Mackey collection of local engravings was purchased, and the Northern Counties exhibition of 1919 became the most successful since its creation: its 447 works and 187 artists received 25,000 visitors, and 34 exhibits were sold for over £284.[83] Everyone seemed eager to forget the war and hurried in rebuilding the country, but CBS, in his address on 'Art and Reconstruction', at the Rotary Club in 1919, begged people not to leave beauty aside in the turmoil. Quoting Keats, he asserted that 'beauty is a joy for ever', and that 'art is a necessity and we cannot live without it.'[84] This was perhaps his motivational quote to keep the gallery open throughout the war despite the adverse circumstances.

C. THE INTERWAR YEARS

The twenty-one-year period between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Second witnessed impactful events such as Black Friday (1921), the National Strike (1926), the Wall Street Crash (1929), and the subsequent economic depression of the 1930s, all of which had significant repercussions on Tyneside due to the mining and industrial base of its economy. For Newcastle, these two decades marked the beginning of irreversible urban transformations, with the building of the Tyne Bridge (1924), the demolition of the Newcastle Gaol (1926) and the first plans for the construction of a new Town Hall (1938). However, they also indicated the starting point in the decline of the local industrial structure, which the

[81] LCM 25-07-1919. TWA, MD.NC/129/3, p.239.
[82] 'Sir W.C. Gray'. *Hartlepool History Then and Now*. https://www.hhtandn.org/person/8/gray,-william-cresswell.
[83] Anon. (10-10-1919). *North Star,* n.p.
[84] Anon. (18-10-1919). 'Fine Art and Industrial Art'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

North-East Coast Exhibition (1929) did not manage to stop. Already since the early 1920s, difficult economic circumstances led the Government to recommend cuts that slowed the post-war recovery of museums in Britain.[85] However, for the Laing, which had its 'coming of age' in 1925, this was a period of growth and maturity, with its involvement in the creation of a Northern Federation of Museums (FMNC), and the strengthening of its network of cooperation with collectors, galleries and museum curators through the annual visits to the RA exhibitions and the participation in the MA conferences (even acting as the host institution in 1937). The curatorial work was complemented by the expertise of a new generation of Committee members, who gradually replaced the original board, meaning that by the thirtieth anniversary of the gallery, Alderman Criddle (n.d.-1940) was the sole surviving member of the inaugural 1904 Committee. This situation strengthened CBS' status as an irreplaceable authority in the gallery, further reinforced through the obtention of relevant exhibitions, purchases and donations.

A significant growth of the permanent collection

During this period, the Laing was especially fortunate in receiving gifts and bequests. Although the money for the Joicey Museum did not become available until 1942, by 1926 the Council had already purchased the land to be occupied by the potential extension, and the ideas and proposals for the new institution provided the Committee meetings of the interwar years with an atmosphere of enthusiasm towards future progress, which was complemented by the arrival of the John Wigham Richardson Bequest (1925) and its subsequent financial stimulus for the consolidation of British watercolours as the most significant element of the Laing's collection (see pp.239-246). Just one year later, the museum section was enriched through Matthew Bell's gift of Sowerby glass. Also relevant to the museum section were the Airth-Robertson Bequest (1933) of over 100 objects and the arrival from Florence of the William Bownas Bond Bequest of antiques.[86] The involvement of prominent local citizens in the Committee during this period was also fruitful for the

[85] A Government's committee on public expenditure chaired by Sir Eric Geddes in 1922, the so-called 'Geddes Axe', recommended drastic budget cuts, several of which affected the management and functions of museum service. For a wider account of its effects on museums, see McDonald, A. (09-1989). 'The Geddes Committee and the Formulation of Public Expenditure Policy', 1921–1922, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp.643–674.
[86] Anon (24-08-1932). 'Former Newcastle Man's Bequest'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

Laing collections: it is worth mentioning, for example, the several gifts obtained from the shipowner and conservative politician Sir George Renwick (1850-1950), during his tenure on the Laing Committee (1921-1931), when the gallery was involved in the erection of the Northumberland Fusiliers Memorial in Barras Bridge (1923). Similarly, G.E. Henderson's ninetieth-birthday gift (1934) and Bequest (1937) added another 234 artworks to the Laing collection, comprising ceramics, oil paintings, engravings and an important selection of watercolours. Alderman Sir Arthur Lambert (n.d.-1948), who was the Chairman of the Laing Committee at the time, boasted that the items bequeathed were 'valued at several thousands of pounds.'[87] A very successful exhibition of Henderson's legacy took place in 1938: art critic Eva Carter praised the quality of the pieces, stating that 'the collection is composed entirely of works which have stood the acid test of time. In it, there is no painting that is not a perfect specimen of its class. The exhibition possesses a quiet dignity and is well qualified to hang on the walls of a public gallery.'[88]

Also during this period, the Laing joined funds and societies which offered crucial donations. The first subscription signed was with the Northern Art Collections Fund, which had been established by King's College authorities in 1927, targeting the Laing as the main recipient of donations, on these terms:

> for this locality, no less than for London, there is a pressing need of larger resources to enable those responsible for the public art collections to do justice to their responsibilities. The funds at the disposal, for example, of the Laing Art Gallery and Museum - the municipal collection of Newcastle – are entirely inadequate for its development on a standard creditable to so important a centre, and there is a lack of that interest and support from lovers of art in the city and county which would naturally follow if a means of expression were provided. It is with a view to supplying such wants that this fund is proposed. The income derived from annual subscriptions should enable the committee to purchase each year at least one notable work of art for presentation to a local public collection, the one primarily in view being the Laing Art Gallery.[89]

This prioritization is not surprising, as the origins of the Fund owed much to Percy Corder's 'energy and enthusiasm.'[90] Fifty seven of the Fund's founding members

[87] NCR (20-04-1938), p.663. For more details about Henderson's Bequest, see p.280.
[88] Carter, E. (29-04-1938). 'Painters who loved their work'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[89] Anon (04-07-1927). 'Art Collection Fund for the North'. *Daily Journal,* n.p.
[90] Anon (22-02-1928). 'Gift to Laing Art Gallery'. *Daily Journal,* n.p.

were either Laing Committee members, or donors, and there was also an evident connection with the Art School at Armstrong College.[91] Until 1934, the Laing obtained from the Fund eight late modern and contemporary watercolours, two oil paintings, and the sculpture *Mrs Epstein* (1918), by Jacob Epstein (1880-1959). Then (perhaps because of a disagreement regarding the funding of the Laing's lunette decorations, mentioned below) relations were interrupted until 1951, when another two gifts were offered in connection with the Festival of Britain exhibition.

Subscription to the Contemporary Art Society also started in 1927 and had similar success, partially thanks to CBS' annual visits to the Tate, where he used to meet J.B. Manson (Director of the Tate, 1930–38) and H.S. Ede (CAS Secretary, 1922-36), obtaining in this way not only a total of sixteen artworks between 1927 and 1939, but also loans for two exhibitions of prints (1921 and 1929) and for an exhibition of the CAS' latest acquisitions (1934). In 1929, the Laing also joined the NACF, with which CBS followed the same strategy of direct approach to the institutions' members.[92] For instance, at the MA Conference of 1934, he convinced David S. Meldrum (NACF Secretary) to ask the Fund to buy for the Laing twelve drawings by T.M. Richardson Jr. (1813-90) which had just been put for sale.[93] Because of this quick action, Alderman Criddle, the then Laing Committee Chairman, nicknamed the curator 'our wise watchdog'.[94]

The steady arrival of donations, together with the coming into effect of the Library Act (1919), which removed the rate limit for museum support, allowed the Laing to devote larger sums to purchases. One consequence was the first commission to local artists in the form of a series of lunette decorations.[95] The project – which involved eight artists and took eight years to completion – provided the Laing with one of its most remarkable decorative features, but also strengthened its role of encouragement of local art and its connection with the Armstrong College School of Art. Purchasing methods were also updated, with the award of discretionary power to the Chairman and curator 'to attend any exhibitions deemed advisable for

[91] LCM 27-01-1928. TWA, MD/NC/129/4, p.23.
[92] LCM 25-10-1929. TWA, MD/NC/129/4, p.82.
[93] LCM 27-07-1934. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.6.
[94] Anon (29-11-1934). 'Work of the National Art Collections Fund'. *Northern Echo,* n.p.
[95] LCM 30-11-1923. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.438.

purchases', probably as a result of advice given by Sir Charles Holmes (1868-1936), Director of the National Gallery (1916-1928).[96] This autonomy allowed the purchase of many of the watercolours of the Wigham Richardson Fund and several paintings from the annual private views of the RA, the most significant being, perhaps, *Alcantara Bridge, Toledo* (1926), by Oliver Hall (1869-1957).[97] Likely, Sir Charles was consulted as a consequence of a previous, non-recorded discussion on the limitations of the Laing's purchasing methods, as already in 1926 Robinson and CBS had attended the auction sale at Jesmond Towers, purchasing nineteen paintings whose cost of £123.18.6 was advanced by Major Temperley.[98] The risky operation was successful, because there the curator spotted and recognised the watercolour *Carrying Hay* (n.d.), by Peter De Wint, which was purchased for £18. It was later discovered that the Mitchells had paid about £150 for it, so this represented an excellent deal (for purchasing methods, see pp.212-231).[99]

The connection with interwar museum policies

CBS' attendance at the MA annual meetings became more regular during the interwar years, allowing the Laing to achieve a steadier connection with the issues globally affecting the museum sector in this period, especially those related to the shift towards a focus on education and the needs of the visitor.[100] The Laing did its best to follow the trend: between 1918 and 1939, seven exhibitions displaying artworks by children were organised, one of them, the London County Council Schools Exhibition (1933), being even brought from London as a consequence of an article on the subject by Roger Fry.[101] The gallery also celebrated a series of annual on-site drawing competitions. The idea, borrowed from the Kelvingrove Art Gallery, in Glasgow, got the support of the Newcastle Education Committee and soon became very popular (53 schools competed in 1937, with the gallery receiving over

[96] LCM 30-03-1928. TWA, MD/NC/129/4, p.31.
[97] Rea, C. (26-11-1926). Letter to C.B. Stevenson. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.594.
[98] LCM 24-09-1926. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.582
[99] Anon (22-02-1935). 'Bought £150 painting for only £18.' *North Mail,* n.p.
[100] Pearson, C. (2008). *Curators, Culture and Conflict. The effects of the Second World War on Museums in Britain, 1926-1965.* (Unpublished Doctoral thesis). UCL, London, U.K., p.49.
[101] Fry, R. (24-06-1933). 'Children's drawings at the County Hall'. *New Statesman of Nation,* n.p.

400 students copying works at a time), being imitated by the Shipley Art Gallery.[102] Events for adults were also arranged, such as lectures, two exhibitions of the work of the Architecture students at King's College, an exhibition of engraving tools requested from the V&A, and even a series of BBC radio programmes where CBS explained about the masterpieces of the Laing to a broad, non-specialised audience.[103]

Another museum trend occupying the MA interwar conferences were Regional Folk Museums. In 1934, CBS defended such a museum as a way to save historical local buildings from the destruction already taking place in Newcastle in connection with the redevelopment of the city centre:

> Many fine old houses and buildings have been destroyed in recent years in connection with the changes and developments of this city. Today we are considering the demolition of that fine block of buildings known as Holy Jesus Hospital […] If it must be removed from its present position, I suggest its rebuilding on a suitable site, as the beginning of an Open-Air Museum for the North of England.[104]

This premonitory vision of an open-air museum preceded by over twenty years the idea followed by Frank Atkinson for the genesis of Beamish Open-Air Museum in 1958.[105]

The Laing's involvement in the MA during the interwar years even led to the hosting of the 48th MA Conference in Newcastle in 1937, implying CBS' election as honorary local secretary together with Russell Goddard (Curator of the Hancock).[106] The first mention of the MA 1937 conference in Newcastle's local press was signed by the gallery's former assistant curator, Sidney L. Davison, who probably because of his past involvement in the MA (he had been both a Councillor and Vice-President) felt authorised to give advice on how to make the city ready for the event. As the MA conferences always aroused interest in the city's local museums, Davison felt that the event could do much to put Newcastle 'in its proper place in the museum world.'[107] He recommended to put 'the goods before the public' by creating a

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[102] Carter, E. (16-12-1938). 'Hedley's Works for Gateshead'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[103] 'BBC Radio Times' (March-June 1927). https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/13f591013b5a73c7ef8f1ebb6c9cffb6.
[104] LCM 27-07-1934. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.6.
[105] Cross, G. and Walton, J.K. (2005) *The Playful Crowd: Pleasure Places in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press. pp.205-237.
[106] Anon (11-06-1937). 'City conference of museum chiefs'. *Daily Journal,* n.p.
[107] Davison, S.L. (16-01-1937). 'Museums Association'. *Weekly Chronicle,* n.p.

'Museum Week' with special exhibitions and receptions to which all the known local artists, collectors and critics would be invited, and which would also include film displays showing the museum's activities in the city. It does not seem, however, that the organisers paid much attention to the suggestions, as the programme was mostly internal and focused on the need to make museums more interesting to the public 'to combat the attractions of the cinema, wireless and motor car.'[108] The conference, however, did not bring the Laing the notoriety that its committee had expected and instead, the Hancock was rewarded, with its curator Russell Goddard being elected as a member of the MA Council (fig.4).[109]

The interwar exhibitions

The analysis of the over 80 loan exhibitions held between 1918 and 1939 gives an overview of the Laing's interwar aims and interests. Besides the educational events and the history and industrial design displays arranged in the museum section, most of the exhibitions dealt with three main subjects: local art, Modern Art and early British painting.

Local art was the strongest element in the programme. On top of the twenty Northern Counties exhibitions arranged, the gallery held eight exhibitions devoted to individual local artists, most of them contemporary: G. Horton (1859-1950), T.B. Garvie (1854-1944), John F. Slater (1857 - 1937), Frank T. Carter (1853-1934), Ernest Procter (1855-1935), Ralph Hedley (1848-1913), or the first big-scale exhibition of the Ashington group. But there were also two commemorative exhibitions devoted to Myles Birkett Foster (1825-99) and Thomas Bewick (1753-1828). This demonstrates the centrality of Northumbrian identity in the Laing's principles, counteracting the idea that 'the gallery's commitment to such art was not continuously sustained and remained of secondary importance.'[110] The presence of Newcastle artists (such as Professors Hatton, Dickey and Mainds), and connoisseurs/collectors (like Henderson, Temperley, Renwick and Corder) in the Laing Committee during this period was decisive in fostering this local predilection. Indeed, it was under Corder

[108] Anon (07-07-1937). 'Museums as cinema counter-attraction'. *North Mail,* n.p.
[109] Anon (09-07-1937). 'Honour for curator'. *Daily Journal,* n.p.
[110] Mumba, R. (2008) *Class, nation and localism in the Northumberland art world, 1820-1939.* (Doctoral thesis, Durham University, Durham, U.K.), p139. Retrieved from http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2243/

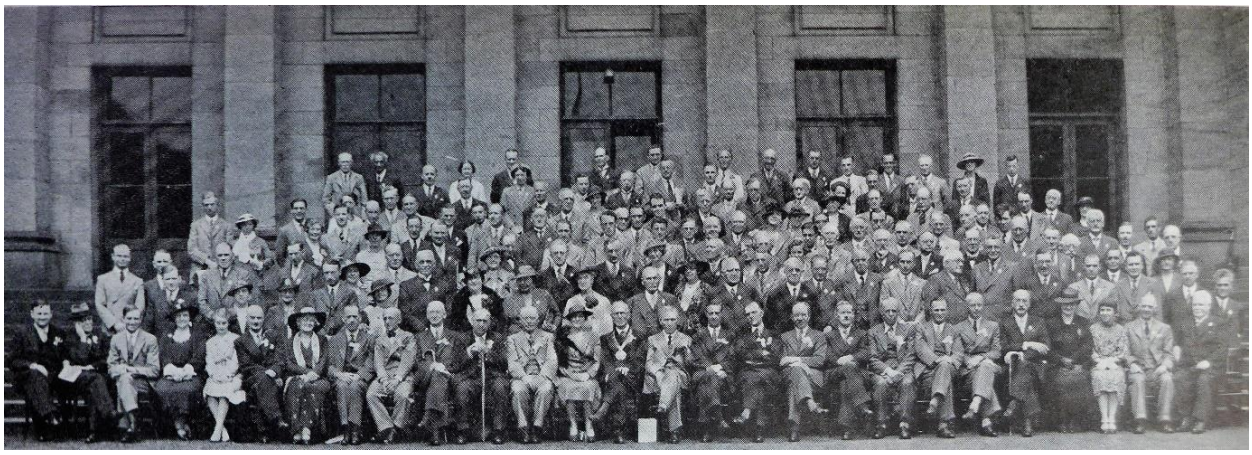

Fig. 4. Group photograph of the attendants to the MA Conference of 1937 in front of the Hancock Museum. CBS is the sixth person on the left on the bottom row. *Museums Journal,* vol.37.

and Hatton's influence that the Northern Counties exhibitions acquired their definitive form (see pp.246-270).

Like many British regional galleries in the interwar period, the Laing also focused on the collection and display of modern art, following the ideology of institutions like the CAS, which lent exhibitions to fifty-three provincial galleries during the period 1911-39.[111] On top of the vast majority of local art exhibitions dealing with contemporary artists, the Laing arranged another fourteen displays of modern art between 1918-1939, plus several chronological overviews in which modern art had a decisive weight. Indeed, modern painting was quickly and consciously becoming a major subject in the Laing's collection. The focus (and its financial justification) was so evident in the display of the permanent collection arranged for the gallery's Coming of Age Exhibition in 1925, that in his opening speech, the art expert and liberal MP Sir Martin Conway (1856-1937) praised that 'one can buy today pictures that, 100 years hence, will be worth fifty times as much as is now given for them.'[112]

However, thinking that the Laing's defence of modern painting was only guided by finance would be a limiting idea, as can be proved by the nature of its interwar modern art exhibitions. It is true that some of the loans came from commercial galleries (such as the Beatrice How paintings sent from London by Walker Galleries in 1935) and that commissions were obtained from the sales of paintings lent by living artists (like in the Harold and Laura Knight's exhibition in 1933). Indirectly profitable was also the Epstein exhibition lent by the collector Alfred C. Bossom in 1931, because the lending conditions specified that ticket sales would be reinvested in the purchase of modern art, so the Laing spent the profits in purchasing *St Mark Square, Venice* (1903ca.) by Walter Richard Sickert (1860-1942) and the watercolours *Christ Before the People* (1928), by Tom Nash (1891-1968) and *Bay in South of France* (1905) by Derwent Lees (1884-1931).[113] But most of the exhibits were obtained through the CAS (in 1921, 1929 and 1934) or through individual

[111] Summerfield, A. (2007). *Interventions: Twentieth-century art collection schemes and their impact on local authority art gallery and museum collections of twentieth century British art in Britain*. (Doctoral thesis, UCL, London, U.K.), p.147. Retrieved from https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/17420/

[112] Anon (14-10-1925). 'Snobbery of "Old Masters"'. *North Mail,* n.p.

[113] LCM 26-02-1932. TWA, MD/NC/129/4, p.174. The Epstein exhibition provoked intense reactions, comparable to those happened twelve years earlier in Liverpool, when two sculptures of the artist were displayed at the Walker's Autumn Exhibition. See: Morris, E. and Stevens, T. (2013). The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1873-2000. Bristol: Sanson & Co., p.24, and LCM 26-02-1932. TWA, MD/NC/129/4, p.174.

collectors who did not intend to put them for sale, like the paintings lent by Arthur Crossland in 1938.

Instead, and again following the interwar trend, the Laing's modern art exhibitions aimed to educate public taste. As Dr. Collingwood Stewart pointed out when proposing the Crossland exhibition: 'I know they are not everybody's pictures, but there is interest in every one of them in some form or other,' and 'I think that we should show all phases of Art.'[114] His intuition about the reactions of local visitors proved right: whilst some considered the exhibition 'not severely modern, and found that 'most of the works are frankly decorative',[115] others thought that 'some of the nude figures are most grotesque, if not actually revolting – not because of any indecency, but because the beauty of the human form is interpreted with such ugly crudeness.'[116] But the most irate criticisms were connected to the exhibition of the Artists International Association, held just before the outbreak of the Second World War, including complaints against CBS, in the expectation that he would 'try, at least, to justify hanging so obvious leg-pulling paper puzzles in an art gallery where the public has a right to expect works of art.'[117] Actually, the Laing Committee seemed more open towards modernism than other regional galleries: for instance, the Walker's committee's decidedly hostile attitude towards modernist paintings during the interwar period made the gallery loose its position as the leader of contemporary art in Liverpool.[118]

A third group of exhibitions in the Laing's interwar schedule dealt with artists from earlier periods of British Art, or with historical overviews of different techniques. A total of twelve exhibitions of this kind were arranged between 1918 and 1939, in most cases using whole private collections (like the Harvey Collection lent by the NACF in 1920, or the G.E. Henderson Bequest collection shown in 1937), or the pre-arranged loan collections obtained from the V&A and the National Gallery, which toured several regional museums in the period. Luckily for the Laing, the Geddes Committee's recommendation for the Board of Education to charge half the actual

[114] LCM 31-03-1939. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.181.
[115] Anon (25-03-1939). 'Contemporary art exhibition at Newcastle'. *Northern Echo,* n.p.
[116] J.B. (27-03-1939). 'Modern art exhibition'. *Newcastle Journal,* n.p.
[117] 'Northman'. 'Laing Art Gallery "Explosives"'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[118] Ibid as 44, p.36.

cost of transporting loans to the borrowing museums was discarded after being severely criticized by the MA for its disadvantaging peripheral regions.[119] This unchanged national loan system allowed the Laing to host the Turner exhibition of 1924, which was advertised as 'the largest of its kind ever exhibited out of London', showing 162 pictures coming from different public galleries, private collectors and first-rate dealers like Agnew.[120] Despite a review at *The Studio,* an opening speech delivered by James L. Caw (Director of the National Gallery of Scotland) and Percy Corder's public appeal on its relevance, the event (with 17,000 visitors) was less popular than most of the Northern Counties exhibitions held in the period, something that demonstrates the artistic preferences of the local public.[121] The collection of funds for the public purchase of Turner's *Tivoli with the Temple of the Sibyl* (1794-7) was not much of a success, either: it took almost a year to collect £250 of the total of £400 requested by the owners, despite the Chairman's claims that:

> Our limited gallery funds do not permit the purchase of this, but it can be obtained by subscriptions. The gallery does not possess a Turner, and it would be a great pity to miss this opportunity, and with the Americans eagerly picking up any of Turner's works offered for sale, and paying almost any price for them, our chance of obtaining one – except by gift – is very remote.[122]

The fact that the owners eagerly acceded to sell the painting for the £250 collected seemed to confirm CBS' doubts regarding the authorship of the painting. Luckily, the arrival of the Wigham Richardson Fund shortly after allowed the Laing to finally purchase a genuine Turner (see p.277).

Interwar gallery management

A new interwar feature was the greater degree of expertise of the Laing Committee members. A generational shift had gradually taken place, and the new members joining in the 1920s and 1930s started to be selected for their art knowledge and not due to their public notoriety as hitherto (see p.178). Instrumental in this shift was Percy Corder's membership between 1914 and 1927. Probably because of his

[119] See note 85.
[120] Anon (07-11-1924). 'Turner pictures'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[121] Corder, Percy (28-11-1925). 'Turner's paintings at Laing Gallery'. *Daily Journal,* n.p.
[122] Robinson, A.J. (23-12-1924). 'Turner at the Laing Gallery'. *Daily Chronicle,* n.p.

Quaker connections, Corder was instrumental in the acquisition of Mrs Spence Watson's Bequest in 1919, and, more notably, in getting the Wigham Richardson Fund in 1925 (see pp.233-239), whose donors were both Quakers. Corder's influence seems to have also had an impact on the Laing's preference towards local art. For instance, he was responsible for the decision to hold the Birkett Foster exhibition at the Laing in 1925, in which many of the paintings displayed came either from his personal collection or from his brother Walter's. And he was also involved in the choice of subjects for the lunette decorations together with his brother Walter, Professor Hamilton Thompson and Professor Hatton.[123] Whilst Hatton was not yet a Laing Committee member at that time, he was added shortly after on Corder's suggestion.[124] This shift towards a more specialised Committee brought as a consequence the disappearance of the tradition to offer a spot to one of Alexander Laing's relatives. Despite complaints from Alexander Laing Gibbon (the donor's nephew), the founder's relatives ceased from then on to be appointed to the gallery Committee.[125]

In connection to the museum modernisation during the period, and with the MA concerns on the matter, the Laing staff during the interwar period also tended to have more specialised training, thus gaining independence from CBS' supervision.[126] For instance, Assistant Curator S.L. Davison carried out a solo direction of the gallery in 1921, during CBS' six-month illness leave. Davison successfully arranged two exhibitions of modern art, a children's craft competition and two displays of etching and drawing. Paradoxically, this demonstration of capabilities allowed him to obtain the position of curator at the Lady Lever Art Gallery (Port Sunlight) in 1922. CBS' proposal to replace Davison with Miss Pescod (chief clerk since 1913) was rejected because 'it was desirable that a man be in charge of the gallery in the absence of the curator'.[127] The Committee's objection was old-fashioned even in the interwar context, as by the 1930s several provincial galleries had already employed women assistant curators, and by 1938 half of the candidates to the MA Diploma

[123] LCM 29-02-1924. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.448.
[124] LCM 19-12-1924. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.486.
[125] LCM 29-11-1929. TWA, MD/NC/129/4, p.85.
[126] Several MA discussions in 1920 and 1921 had drawn attention to the problem of 'self-taught, unsystematically-trained provincial personnel'. Ibid as 27, p.39.
[127] LCM 29-09-1922. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.386.

were female.[128] The position was finally filled by a young local clerk, Thomas Wake, but cooperation with Davison and the Lady Lever continued over time.[129]

As a result of the more specialised staff and Committee, the Laing increased its presence as a generator of cultural initiatives, which, however, frequently became too ambitious for the gallery's reach. That was the case of the proposal of forming a Mechanical Museum at the gallery.[130] Nevertheless, the idea - discarded for logistical reasons - was the seed for the Municipal Museum of Science and Industry, opened in 1934, thus evidencing both the creative potential of the Laing committee and the negative impact of their limitations in funding and space.

Another example of duties going beyond the gallery's walls was the involvement in the North-East Coast Exhibition of 1929, an event created for the promotion of the region in the context of the 'depression in North-east industry that had broadly persisted since the end of the First World War.'[131] The Laing's influence in the arrangements can be found in several aspects: firstly, several Laing Committee members related to the shipbuilding business belonged to the Exhibition organising board. Also related to the Laing Committee was the industrialist Sir Arthur W. Lambert (1876-1948), Lord Mayor of Newcastle in 1929 and instigator of the North-East Coast Exhibition.[132] Secondly, several of the gallery's artworks - such as *Morning* (1926) by Dod Procter (1890–1972), which had been loaned to the Laing - were transferred to the Exhibition's Palace of Arts.[133] The recruitment of E.R. Dibdin as curator of the Palace is probably also assignable to his link to CBS.[134]

However, despite reaching over four million visitors, the event could not overcome the difficult period in which it was held: with the Wall Street Crash taking place just two days before the closure, the 'catastrophic effect on industries such as shipbuilding far outweighed any stimulus there might have been'.[135] Likely, the failure

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[128] Ibid as 100, p.78.
[129] LCM 27-11-1922. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.395.
[130] LCM 27-04-1923. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.414.
[131] Barke, M. (2014). 'The North East Coast Exhibition of 1929: Entrenchment or Modernity?' *Northern History*, *50* (1), p.158.
[132] Twice Mayor of Newcastle, Regional Chancellor of the Exchequer, Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, member of the Tyne Improvement Commission and governor of the Royal Grammar School, Sir Arthur was an influential figure in the Laing´s interwar and Second World War period.
[133] LCM 27-07-1928. TWA, MD/NC/129/4, p.46.
[134] Bather, F.A., ed. (1928). 'Notes and News.' *Museums Journal, vol.28,* p.211. For the friendship between Dibdin and CBS, see pp.170-172.
[135] Griffiths, J. (06-2018). 'A successful failure'. Lecture on the North-East Coast Exhibition 1929. Newcastle Society of Antiquaries. http://www.newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk/clearsight/documents/uploaded/NB65-web.pdf.

had an impact on the Laing Committee members, as the concern about Tyneside's financial circumstances guided a number of the Laing's initiatives in the 1930s, such as the educational displays in the museum section attempting to revive local traditional craft industries, or the poster competition arranged with the Tyneside Industrial Development Board in 1935, which aimed to attract new industries to the region. The winning piece, with its motto 'Tyneside – Where industry grows' was 'printed in thousands and sent around the world through ocean-going liners, railways, ships leaving the Tyne and on long distance road vehicles'.[136] Nevertheless, the success of the initiative is difficult to measure, due to the adverse international panorama of the following years. An example of this international instability can be found in the Laing's refusal to loan artworks to the British Council exhibition of Contemporary British Art, which was being sent to Warsaw, Helsinki and Stockholm in 1938.[137]

Finance

Funding difficulties continued throughout the period. An attempt to obtain income for hiring staff by making 'a small charge for admission, like some of the London Galleries' was discarded after acknowledging that practically no regional art galleries made charges, although it is likely that the MA's position against admission fees may have influenced the decision.[138] The under-provision of staff apparently led to day-time thefts in 1922 and 1926.[139] Unfortunately, neither ratepayers nor the City Council seemed to be aware of the Laing's financial difficulties. In 1925, George Lundi, Secretary of the local Property Owners' Association, expressed his views that the Laing had 'a semi-luxury committee' (sic) and defended that 'while the trade depression continued, the Art Gallery could, without a word of regret, be closed two or three times a week.'[140] Following the suggestion, in 1927 the Newcastle Council attempted to amalgamate the Public Libraries and Laing Committees, something that would have had disastrous consequences for the gallery, but that was avoided due

[136] Anon (02-08-1935). 'Tyneside on posters.' *North Mail,* n.p.
[137] LCM 13-01-1939. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.174.
[138] The measure had been another of the saving proposals defended by the Geddes Committee (see note 85).
[139] LCM 26-01-1923. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.403.
[140] Anon (30-03-1925). 'Call for economy'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

to the obstacle of Alexander Laing's Deed of Gift.[141] The proposal may have been a biased interpretation of the advice given by the Royal Commission on national Museums and Galleries, established in that year with an aim to regulate provincial museums.[142]

Funding for purchases persisted as the most pressing need in the period. In an attempt to overcome the shortage, the Laing made two public appeals for donations in 1923 and 1924, on the grounds that there were many artworks

> in the possession of wealthy people, and if they could not give the pictures, […] they could assist financially so that it would be possible for the committee to purchase pictures. As time went on, these old pictures were getting more expensive. The committee had very little money to spend on pictures. After they had paid for upkeep, salaries and wages, lighting and so on, there was only £400 per annum left for pictures, cases, fittings and frames. Thus their purchasing powers were very circumscribed.[143]

A further Council attempt to reduce the Laing Estimates for 1927-28 was successfully rejected using the argument of the Jesmond Towers auction sale held in 1926, in which the Laing had only been able to participate because Major Temperley had volunteered to lend the money.[144] But circumstances were not always so favourable, and in 1934 the Laing failed to obtain the £300 needed to purchase *Tangiers* (c.1887), by Robert Crawhall (1861-1913) from the local dealer Saville Bell. In the dealer's words, 'pictures by this artist are so very scarce that this is the first I have ever known to come under the hammer. I offered the picture to the Laing Art Gallery, and though I believe several members of the committee were very anxious to acquire it, my communication was never even acknowledged.'[145] The painting was sold at Sotheby's for 400 guineas and the Laing Committee could only express 'the hope that the present pitifully small funds will soon be increased sufficiently to enable it to prevent masterpieces, such as the picture before mentioned, leaving the town.'[146] As can be imagined, the Laing's financial situation had not undergone any improvement when, only a year later, another Crawhall was auctioned, being sold for

[141] LCM 28-10-1927. TWA, MD/NC/129/4, p.11.
[142] Ibid as 27, p.39.
[143] Anon (21-12-1923). 'Old watercolours of quality wanted'. *Daily Chronicle,* n.p.
[144] Newcastle Council Minutes. 2-3-1927. L352 N536 (1), p.484.
[145] Anon (24-4-1934). 'Famous North Painting. Opportunity lost by Laing Art Gallery.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[146] LCM 26-04-1935. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.38.

£1,207, again beyond the gallery's reach.[147] In fact, the only two pieces by this artist obtained during CBS' tenure arrived as gifts, again proving how crucial donations were in the creation of the permanent collection.

D. THE LAING AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The years between 1939 and 1945 were especially intense for the Laing, with a record number of 900,000 visitors, 3,000 donations, eighty-five exhibitions and several innovative activities. These unparalleled numbers in the history of the gallery gather further significance when considering that the management was done with only a third of the usual staff, with budget reductions and without the possibility to use the permanent collection, meaning that the empty gallery was put at the service of the citizenship as a cultural and leisure venue and as a showcase for propaganda. The period can be considered as a kind of second start, since it was also the training period of the second curator of the Laing, Collingwood Maltby Stevenson (1914-84), who had to prove his own value and create a highly efficient working partnership with his father. The gallery successfully implemented new policies that evolved in response to the changing needs of the wartime context.

Getting ready for a 'national emergency'

Unlike the months preceding the First World War, when the Laing continued its normal operation, the Committee minutes of the summer of 1939 already show a growing concern for the warlike climate that was beginning to be felt in Europe and attest to the implementation of preventive measures prior to the beginning of the conflict. Having in mind the lesson learned twenty years earlier, the Committee members tried to prevent potential issues such as the enlistment of the staff or the difficulties in transferring works of art, adding to these concerns the new danger of air raids, which in the previous war had only represented a relatively low threat. The first provisions taken regarded the staff, in the awareness that museum attendants were classed as unreserved occupations, in contrast to curators (who were initially

[147] Anon (13-04-1935). 'Painting sold for £1,207'. *North Mail,* n.p.

granted reserved status as Government officers), so they would be among the first to be called up.[148] For them, the Laing adopted 'the same course as the Ministry of Health with regard to militia men, namely – that there be no issue of civil pay in respect of the period of training, subject to any cases of hardship being considered on their merits, and to any amendment of the decision of the Minister on the matter being reconsidered.'[149] Further arrangements dealt with the protection of the people in the event of an air raid. Aspects discussed included the creation of a shelter, staff training, equipment for emergency measures and the provision of the gallery with stretchers, blinds for darkening the windows, first aid outfits, and sandbag walling for the most vulnerable points of the building. Due to the weakness of the skylights, a ¼" steel laid on fire-proof planking was suggested. The City Engineer was requested to prepare an underground shelter for 20/30 people.[150]

Regarding the protection of the collections, three methods of safeguarding (protection in place, transferal to safer storage in the gallery, or removal elsewhere) were discussed, and finally a mixture of the first two options was agreed: museum artefacts would be kept in their cases, marking them in order of importance, and arranging packing boxes next to them, where the objects would be placed in case of an emergency. The City Library provided an underground storeroom which would keep the most valuable objects, whilst the collections which could not be removed would be protected with corrugated iron sheeting and sandbags. Duplicate lists of the objects present at the collection were written and the windows of the top store (which had a concrete floor and was therefore scheduled to keep the most valuable canvases) were blinded with steel shutters and the walls covered with sandbags. The frames were removed, and the pictures were marked in order of importance to ensure rapid removal. Unfortunately, the list of the paintings considered most deserving of being saved has not been kept, but details regarding the three small storage rooms are a reminder of the always present storage difficulties, which became more evident in those months prior to the war.[151]

[148] Ibid as 100, p.116.
[149] LCM 30-06-1939. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.188.
[150] Ibid, p.193.
[151] Ibid, p.194.

Nevertheless, the initial plans for safeguarding changed drastically after CBS' attendance at the MA Conference in July, where he probably discussed with other provincial curators the inadequacy of the advice issued by the Standing Commission in *Air Raid Precautions in Museums* (1939).[152] Immediately after his return, and amidst increasing transport difficulties, the bulk of the Laing collection - over a thousand pictures worth about £250,000 - was sheltered away in the Northumberland hills, apparently being 'examined regularly and found to be in a state of excellent preservation.'[153] The exact location of the shelter was never written up in the minutes, but a post-war comment suggests that the artworks were sent to Whitton Tower, in Rothbury, not far from the exhibits of the Hancock Museum, which were stored at the founder's home in Cragside.[154] As soon as the war started, and following the example of the national galleries, the Laing closed its doors to carry out arrangements for its remaining 10,000 exhibits (fig.5).[155] Hundreds of pictures were removed from the walls, and the most valuable museum objects were packed in boxes. The city Engineer converted the cloakrooms into Air Raid shelters, made the Library shelter accessible from the museum, and boarded up windows to secure the less important pictures, which were placed in the hall and on the staircase. V&A loans and most long-term loans from private lenders were also packed and safeguarded.[156]

A depleted but highly efficient staff

One of the key factors in the success of the Laing's wartime policies was the ability to make the most of a staff whose numbers were even more reduced than usual, as, almost immediately after the declaration of war, three of the four attendants were called up, as well as the office assistant, being left just a few days to remove pictures and objects. Before leaving for the front, these four men 'worked most strenuously and for long hours', for which they were thanked by the curator, who asked the Committee to appoint two temporary attendants to help the remaining foreman

[152] Ibid as 100, p.99.
[153] Anon (18-04-1945). '£250,000 City Art Treasures in hills'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[154] LCM 28-07-1946. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.38
[155] Ibid as 100, p.101.
[156] LCM 29-09-1939. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.199.

Fig.5. The protection of the Laing's museum galleries in 1939. TWA.

to continue 'clearing up and opening out as fully as possible on a more or less skeleton basis'.[157] Besides these two appointments, CBS' secretary, Miss Pescod, took over the duties of the mobilised chief clerk.

The arrangements seemed to work, and there were praises to the staff's efficiency. For example, Lord Eustace Perry - Chairman of the North-East Regional Committee for Education in HM Forces, who was in charge of the 'Arts and Crafts Exhibition by members of HM Forces from Berwick to Middlesbrough' (1943) - thanked CBS and his staff,

> not only for the hospitality which they have given to us, but also for organizing and arranging the whole exhibition. My committee cannot sufficiently express their gratitude to Mr. Stevenson for all that he has done to further this most important branch of education in the Services; without his leadership the present exhibition would have been impossible.[158]

Leadership, indeed, was key, together with organisational skills and speed of execution, because exhibitions succeeded frenetically, as exemplified in this comment regarding the exhibition 'Life in the Colonies' (1943):

> Two hours before the Colonial exhibition was due to be officially opened, stands and units of the display were still being constructed – even to the point of place-names being painted on to the three-dimensional maps. But it opened to the minute with nothing more as evidence of the hustle except a rather 'fresh' smell of paint.[159]

The staff's efficiency was further enhanced through the replacement of one of the office attendants called up by CBS' youngest son, Collingwood Stevenson. Despite the war budget shortages, Collingwood's status in the gallery rose quickly: his salary was increased twice within the first year, and by the end of 1941, thanks to his 'excellent work' and the receipt of a MA (Hons) he reached the maximum of the Second Class Grade on the City Council's pay scale.[160] One year later, and 'attending to his abilities and qualifications', he was appointed as a permanent Assistant Curator.[161] This upward career path paralleled CBS' efforts to achieve wage improvements for all the gallery staff, during wartime and beyond. The

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[157] Ibid.
[158] Percy, E. (23-09-1943). 'Education in Forces'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[159] Anon (01-10-1943). 'Colonies Exhibition'. *Newcastle Journal,* n.p.
[160] LCM 28-11-1941. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.224.
[161] LCM 24-11-1944. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.7.

curator's reports in this regard were decisive, as he was probably aware that staff had been instrumental in the wartime success, and therefore was striving for his team to be rewarded accordingly. Feasibly, his optimistic proposals were influenced by the prospective of State financial support for local museums in connection with the election of a Labour Government in 1945.[162] But perhaps the curator - who in 1946 had turned 72 - was also concerned with the creation of better working conditions and personnel resources for his son as future Director of the Laing.

In any case, neither age nor war stopped CBS's professional career, which between 1939 and 1945 reached several further milestones, such as the publication of his most famous work, the *Illustrated Catalogue of the Permanent Collection of Water Colour Drawings* (1939).[163] The Royal Water Colour Society praised the book by devoting their twenty-fifth annual volume to the watercolour section of the Laing (despite the collection not being on show due to the war) and the local press highlighted the curator's part in the Laing having become part of 'the most important yearly record of British water-colour art published.'[164] Collaboration with Edward VII School of Art in King's College increased through CBS' involvement in the art group 'Looking at Pictures', started by Professor Robert Lyon in October 1941. Appreciation came also from other curators in the region, who elected CBS as President of the FMNC in 1945.[165]

Last, the war altered the operating routines of the Committee, which by September 1939 suspended its meetings. The paper shortage further accentuated the difficulties of circulation of information among the Committee members, who in 1940 stopped receiving copies of the minutes.[166] The fact that the minute book of the war years is written even on its back cover proves the pressing nature of the problems of lack of paper. It is only possible to speculate who was taking the decisions regarding the

[162] Ibid as 100, p.260.
[163] LCM 26-01-1940. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.205.
[164] Anon (06-01-1944). Art world honour for Laing Chief. *Newcastle Journal,* n.p.
[165] The Federation of Museums of the Northern Counties had been created in 1933 as one of the regional networks of cooperation proposed by the MA, and included the Laing, the Sunderland Art Gallery, the Shipley, the Carlisle Museum, the Darlington Art Gallery, the Middlesbrough Art Gallery, the South Shields Art Gallery, the Municipal Museum of Science and Industry and the Hancock. Because of the small geographical area covered, the Laing was overly dominant in the group, and therefore was not useful as a solution to overcome the gallery's peripheral condition. As a consequence, the dependence towards the London exhibitions and art galleries continued over time. Ibid as 27, p.38.
[166] LCM 31-5-1940. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.208.

temporary exhibitions, which never in the Laing's history had been as frequent as they were in this period. Feasibly, the influential presence of Sir Arthur Lambert as a Chairman played a crucial part in the decision-making process. But after his resignation in 1943 - probably related to the Ministerial advice against the overlapping of posts – everyday decisions were likely carried out by the team that CBS and his son had consolidated during the first years of the war.[167]

Continuing to build the permanent collection

Despite the interruption of the Committee meetings, both the Wigham Richardson and Glover Funds continued to function, evidencing that proposals for purchases were still being managed, although there is no record of who was making those selections. It is worth noticing that most of the Wigham Richardson's purchases were connected to local art, and therefore made locally, like the Luke Clennell's (1781–1840) watercolours purchased in 1942 and 1943 through the local dealer Messrs. Hughes, suggesting a suspension of the usual peacetime procedures of transporting artworks from London to Newcastle for the Committee's inspection (see pp.220-230).

Gifts and bequests continued to arrive**.** Firstly, the Parker Brewis Collection of arms and armour - whose several hundreds of items had been on loan at the Laing since 1917 - became property of the gallery in 1940.[168] Another bequest of 500 pieces of armour and arms of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries arrived in 1942. Other representative additions were Mrs. Hodgkin's collection of pottery and embroidery, Mrs. Swinburne's collection of lustre ware, and M.M. Ufford's bequest of £200 for purchases.[169] However, staff shortages impeded the classification of these new acquisitions. As CBS denounced,

> As a result of depleted staff, the disruptive effects of the war and the very active programme of exhibitions, concerts, lectures, films, etc, which has been undertaken, it has been impossible to keep in pace with the many big and important collections which have come to the gallery by gift and bequest.[170]

[167] Anon (06-06-1944). Sir A. Lambert. *Newcastle Journal,* n.p.
[168] Anon (December 2, 1940). Brewis Collection Gift to Museum. *Newcastle Journal and North Mail.* n.p.
[169] LCM2-2-1940. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.8.
[170] LCM 26-4-1946. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.30-33.

Indeed, the scarce resources available had to be devoted to war-related activities and exhibitions, which evidences how the war affected not only the creation of the permanent collection, but also the usual work routines connected to it.

Cooperation between Northern galleries

The significant increase of the Laing's collection between 1904 and the 1940s contributed to improve the gallery's status regarding other provincial galleries and even placed it in a position of leadership with respect to Northern museums of more recent foundation. This change is visible in two aspects: the loan of artworks, and the terms of participation in the FMNC. Wartime loans were sent to galleries in the region (like Sunderland, Middlesbrough and Darlington), but also to major national museums like the National Gallery, which borrowed *Piazza San Marco, Venice* (1903-06), by Sickert (1860-1942).[171] Despite transport difficulties, pictures were also lent to the British Council for international exhibitions: first, a watercolour by Frances Hodgkins (1869-1947) for the International Exhibition at Venice, which finally did not reach Italy due to the European situation, and then *The Hammock* (c.1921-3), by Duncan Grant (1885-1978), which was included in the Exhibition of Contemporary British Pictures touring South Africa.[172]

Itinerant exhibitions of the Laing permanent collection, such as the Ralph Hedley exhibition, circulated through the FMNC, whose wartime meetings - many of them held at the Laing – gave Northern curators a forum to exchange views about the Exhibitions of the Ministry of Information (MoI) and the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), discuss post-war reconstruction plans and arrange future exhibitions. In one of these meetings, held in 1945, Collingwood Stevenson presented a paper on 'Post-War development in Art Galleries', which was described as 'almost an advance copy of the Museums' Association Reconstruction Memorandum which had not yet been published.'[173] Indeed, coincidences between Collingwood Stevenson's paper and the MA report evidence the Laing curators' success in staying connected to contemporary museum

[171] LCM 28-11-1941. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.223.
[172] Anon (10-09-1944). 'Pictures for Tour of South Africa.' *Northern Echo,* n.p.
[173] LCM 29-06-1945. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.14.

trends, overcoming both the war context's difficulties for the circulation of information and the Laing's own peripheral circumstances.[174]

The aims of an art gallery in wartime

British curators faced the Second World War thoughtfully, with an energy that went beyond the safeguarding of collections and galleries to include considerations about the usefulness of museums for society and an introspection about their aims. The war was seen as an opportunity for museum development. As the MA advised in 1939, if museums managed to supplement 'the work of conserving the Nation's treasures' with 'educational and inspirational activities', then their position after the war would 'be far stronger than it was in 1918.'[175] The consolidation of networks between regional museums in the interwar period, with the MA having gained its first permanent office and staff in 1929 thanks to the Carnegie Trust, enriched this debate.[176] CBS used the speeches heard in the 1939 MA Conference as the breeding ground for his own reflections regarding the management of the Laing and its wartime exhibitions. In the context of a world threatened by imminent destruction, he gave special importance to the safeguarding of the Laing collection so laboriously obtained over thirty-five years. That guarding was not limited to the material sphere (the protection of objects to avoid their destruction), but also to the safekeeping of the values of beauty and knowledge associated with them. Although CBS' main goal was the collection's educational value, he seemed to believe in what Herbrand Sackville, 9th Earl De La Warr (1900-1976), President of the Board of Education, had described as 'the role of local museums in promoting the right use of leisure', in the idea that 'the State should assist citizens not only on spending leisure time exercising the body, but also the mind and spirit'.[177] CBS reiterated this concept in his own words: 'for those feeling the strain of war-time conditions, the exhibitions have provided much needed relaxation. The collections have also been of great educational importance.'[178] But the curator probably considered that the Laing's role

[174] Ibid as 100, p.257.
[175] Markham, S.F. (1939). 'Museums and the War'. *Museums Journal,* vol. 39, p.317.
[176] Pearson, C. (2017). *Museums in the Second World War: Curators, Culture and Change.* Oxon and New York: Routledge, p.33.
[177] Wignall, E.W., ed. (1939). *Museums Journal,* vol. 39, p.242-245.
[178] Stevenson, C.B. (28-11-1941) 'Report on the use of the Gallery during war-time.' TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.223

should go further than mere leisure, as his notes also included a quote from John Rothenstein (1901-92), Director of the Tate between 1938 and 1964:

> The preservation of beautiful objects and of the tradition of beauty has become a matter of greater urgency than ever before. […]. In a world in which the forces of destruction and of vulgarity are in the ascendant, Art Galleries should become strongholds which stood without compromise for form and for colour, for tradition and for imagination. In the struggle to preserve permanent values, Art Galleries could play a decisive part.[179]

Wartime exhibitions

The Laing - like most British museums - closed after the outbreak of the war to protect the permanent collections. The photos of the empty rooms and the walls covered with sandbags somehow invoke the atmosphere that the gallery would have had before its opening in 1904. In a way, the Laing restarted its journey in 1939, once again deprived of a collection and faced with a reduced budget. However, CBS' thirty-five years of experience and the lessons learned from both the early days of the Laing and the previous war marked significant differences, first evidenced in the speedy re-opening. By 20 September, gallery A was already displaying the Laing collection of etchings together with a selection of original *Punch* drawings. The ever-sought 'educative value' was achieved by labels explaining the process of engraving. As happened during the First World War, problems were converted into opportunities and the exhibition was advertised in the local press in the following terms: 'the war has given Newcastle the first opportunity of seeing the Laing etching collection in its completeness'.[180] The rest of the upper-floor galleries reopened soon afterwards, displaying the Laing collection of Japanese prints, watercolours acquired from the Northern Counties exhibitions and oil paintings by British Living Artists. In this determination to reopen as soon as possible, the Laing was once again following the MA's advice, which had contested the Government's attempts to close museums in wartime. Indeed, the campaign succeeded, and three-quarters of the countries' museums remained open throughout the period.[181]

[179] LCM 28-07-1939. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.196.
[180] Carter, E. (20-09-1939). 'Newcastle Art Gallery is open again.' *Evening Chronicle,* p.6f
[181] Ibid as 100, p.109-110.

As the Laing's Finance Sub-Committee was struggling with war insurances, it became necessary to find a balance between holding interesting exhibitions and protecting the most valuable artworks. Watercolours, etchings, photographs and works by living artists combined a lower market value with logistical advantages. Works on paper could be taken off display and stored more quickly, so this medium was most frequently chosen for the relatively few exhibitions that the Laing organized directly during the war period. The formula worked from the start, and the reopening also served to silence the controversy incited by the catalogue of the exhibition of modern works in Sunderland Art Gallery, which boasted about its courage in staying open despite having being labelled as a 'danger area', 'not you will note, closing down or even packing up, like the Laing'.[182] The attack was answered in the newspapers by the Committee Member J. Collingwood Stewart, who clarified that the Laing had been one of the first galleries to reopen after the necessary safety arrangements, in response to which James Crawley, the newly appointed director of the Sunderland Art Gallery, had no choice but to publicly apologize.[183]

After the first wartime exhibitions, a period of frantic activity started. In the following six years the Laing hosted the record-breaking number of eighty-five exhibitions, most of whose subjects were unfamiliar to the gallery's usual display policies and probably imposed by the circumstances (fig.6). 1940 still did not bring about excessive alterations in the programme. The slight increase in the number of temporary exhibitions (ten instead of six or seven that had been usual in previous years) can be justified by the absence of the permanent collection and did not reach the numbers of the following years. In addition, nine of those ten exhibitions were still directly organized by the Laing and related to artistic content, so - as in the beginning of the First World War - it seems that the war did not affect the routines immediately. Only the first two exhibitions of the year lengthened unusually, probably because it took a while to find how to replace them without using the permanent collections nor recurring to transport means that would have been unreliable, crowded and expensive. The first of these two long exhibitions, already arranged before the war, showed the work of Gabriel Atkin (1897-1937) and continued a series of events

[182] Poulton, W. (26-09-1939). 'Tyne Topics.' *Newcastle Journal and North Mail.* n.p.
[183] Crawley, James (28-09-1939). 'Modern Paintings.' *Newcastle Journal and North Mail.* n.p.

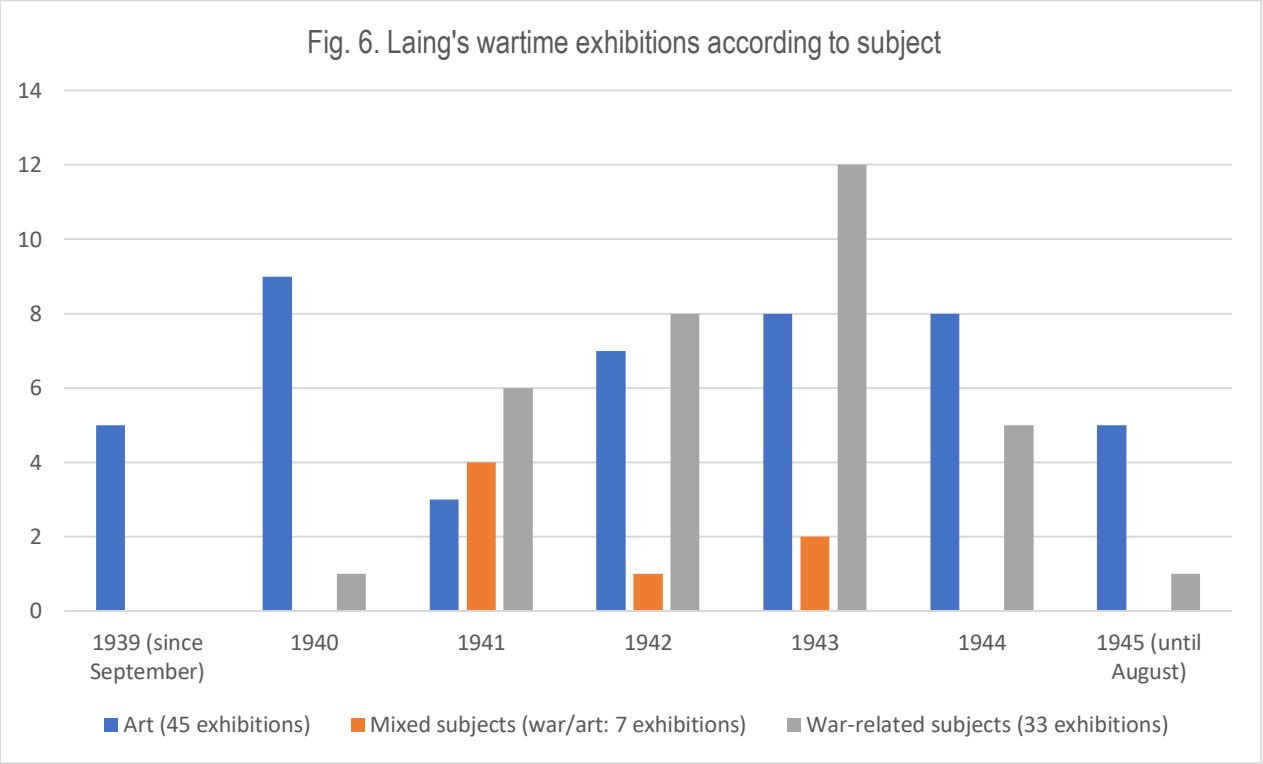
Fig. 6. Laing's wartime exhibitions according to subject
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
1939 (since September)
1940
1941
1942
1943
1944
1945 (until August)
Art (45 exhibitions)
Mixed subjects (war/art: 7 exhibitions)
War-related subjects (33 exhibitions)

dealing with deceased local artists. Like its predecessors in the series, it had been scheduled to last one month, but CBS argued that it 'continued to attract attention' as a justification to extend it for six months, until overlapping partially with the 32nd Northern Counties Exhibition, which had originally been suspended but which was finally held due to the insistence of the artists and the public, who revealed 'a terrific amount of interest.'[184] The rest of the year was covered by eight more exhibitions, of which only the Official War Photographs Exhibition had been organised by the MoI. This trend seems to differ from other regional galleries, which received the majority of MoI's displays in the first two years of the war, whilst those same exhibitions arrived at the Laing at a later stage, mainly in 1941 and 1942, after having already been displayed – and contested – in bigger galleries (fig.7).[185] The reason for this difference seems connected to the fact that Newcastle was, for some reason, one of the last stops in the tour of those displays around the country.

In the period 1941-1944, the number of annual exhibitions held at the Laing increased drastically, with a peak marked by the twenty-two shows of 1943. Although the increased use of temporary exhibitions is common to most regional galleries, which 'needed to demonstrate that they could provide a viable service', not many of them share such impressive numbers: for instance, the Usher Art Gallery (Lincoln) reached a peak of twenty-five exhibitions between 1941 and 1942 (whilst the Laing had twenty-nine in the same period), and the Lady Lever Art Gallery had fifty-four exhibitions between 1939 and 1944 (compared to the seventy-nine held by the Laing in those years).[186] The rhythm was so fast that the Laing opted for grouping several openings on the same day to save time for the personalities in charge of the ceremonies. One example was the simultaneous opening ceremony of the exhibitions 'Artworks by Members of the Civil Defence Services and ARP in Newcastle and District', 'Watercolours of the last war', 'New Life to the Land', and 'Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton.'[187] The change was not only limited to the number of exhibitions, but also to their content, with constant propaganda elements and such repetitive themes that in some occasions CBS confused their titles in his reports.[188]

[184] Anon (08-12-1939). 'A Pleasure.' *Newcastle Journal and North Mail,* n.p.
[185] Ibid as 100, p.157.
[186] Ibid as 100, p.156.
[187] Anon (19-11-1941). 'Mementoes of Nelson in Newcastle.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[188] Stevenson, C.B. (28-11-1941). 'Report of Exhibitions provided by the Ministry of Information.' TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.223.

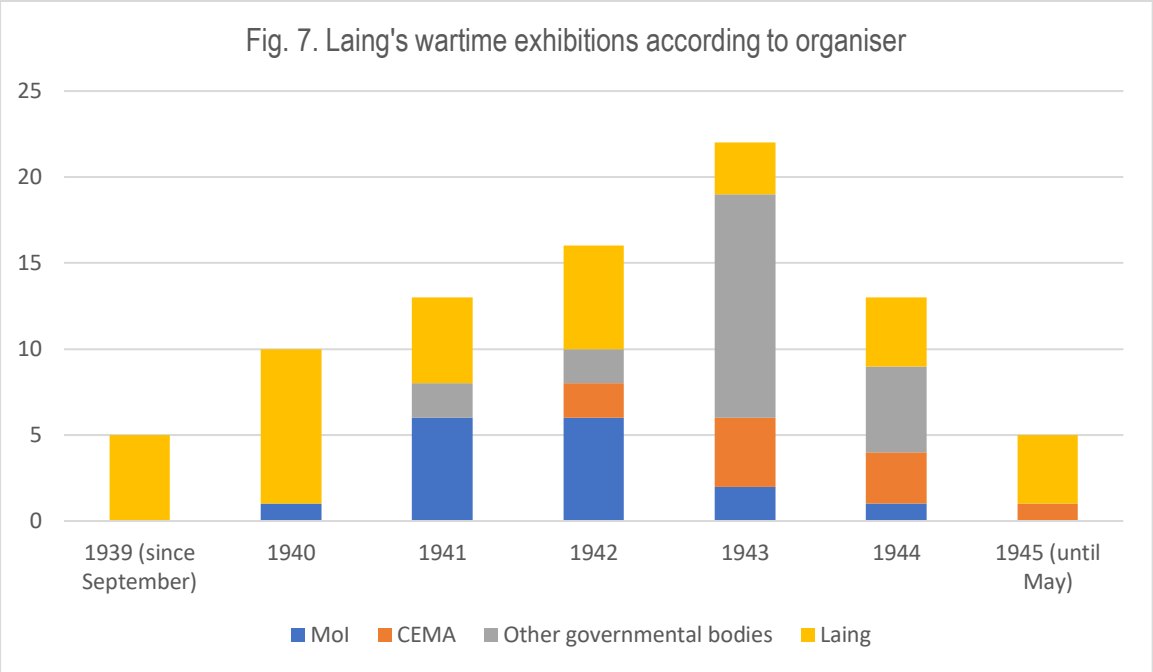
Fig. 7. Laing's wartime exhibitions according to organiser
25
20
15
10
5
0
1939 (since September)
1940
1941
1942
1943
1944
1945 (until May)
MoI
CEMA
Other governmental bodies
Laing

Nearly half of the Laing's wartime exhibitions followed a pattern with common elements: most were short-lasting (fifteen days length in average), had the support of government agencies and received great media coverage. All were opened by political personalities and most included educational activities such as film screenings, lectures, practical demonstrations or guided tours. Within the war theme common to all of them, different types or motivations can be established. Firstly, there were the MoI exhibitions, mainly aimed to raise civilians' morale, to show what common citizens could do regarding war effort, or to instruct them in practices like carrying gas masks (Poison Gas Exhibition, 1941), growing their own vegetables (New Life to the Land, 1941), money saving (Wings for Victory, 1943) or using public transport more wisely (Transport into Action, 1944). Despite the organiser's name, their informative aim was biased because of the fast evolution of the conflict, the MoI's tendency to withhold details of the real progress of the war and their inability to connect with the visitors' feelings.[189] Different sections of the Army organised heavily advertised exhibitions which targeted young men to encourage them to enlist (fig.8). Displays about allied countries, instead, were organised by the British Council, Allied Governments, or the Anglo-Soviet Council - in the case of the many Russian exhibitions held. These events had strategic implications for Newcastle, since several allied countries were customers of the local shipbuilding industry.[190] CBS always spoke in positive terms about war-related displays, affirming that they helped 'those desiring information and facts concerning the progress of the war and war efforts generally'.[191] Therefore, he distanced himself from the rejection that the MoI displays had awakened in other curators, like AL Thorpe, Curator of the Derby Museum, who took his annual leave in September 1942 to avoid the RAF exhibition being held at that time, or Anne Buck, from the Luton Museum, who purposely removed all the propaganda elements from the 'Dig for Victory' exhibition to make it appear as an agricultural science display.[192] These two exhibitions, instead, visited Newcastle without any incident. During the whole war period the Laing only rejected the exhibition 'The Evil we Fight', deemed as 'not suitable for an art gallery' because

[189] Ibid as 100, p.80.
[190] Anon (15-11-1943). 'King Hakoon at Norway's Tyneside Church.' *Newcastle Journal,* n.p.
[191] Ibid as 176.
[192] Rusdale. E.J. (1939-1944). *The Colchester Journals*, ERO D/DU 888. Cited by Pearson, C. (2017). *Museums in the Second World War: Curators, Culture and Change.* Oxon and New York: Routledge, p.78.

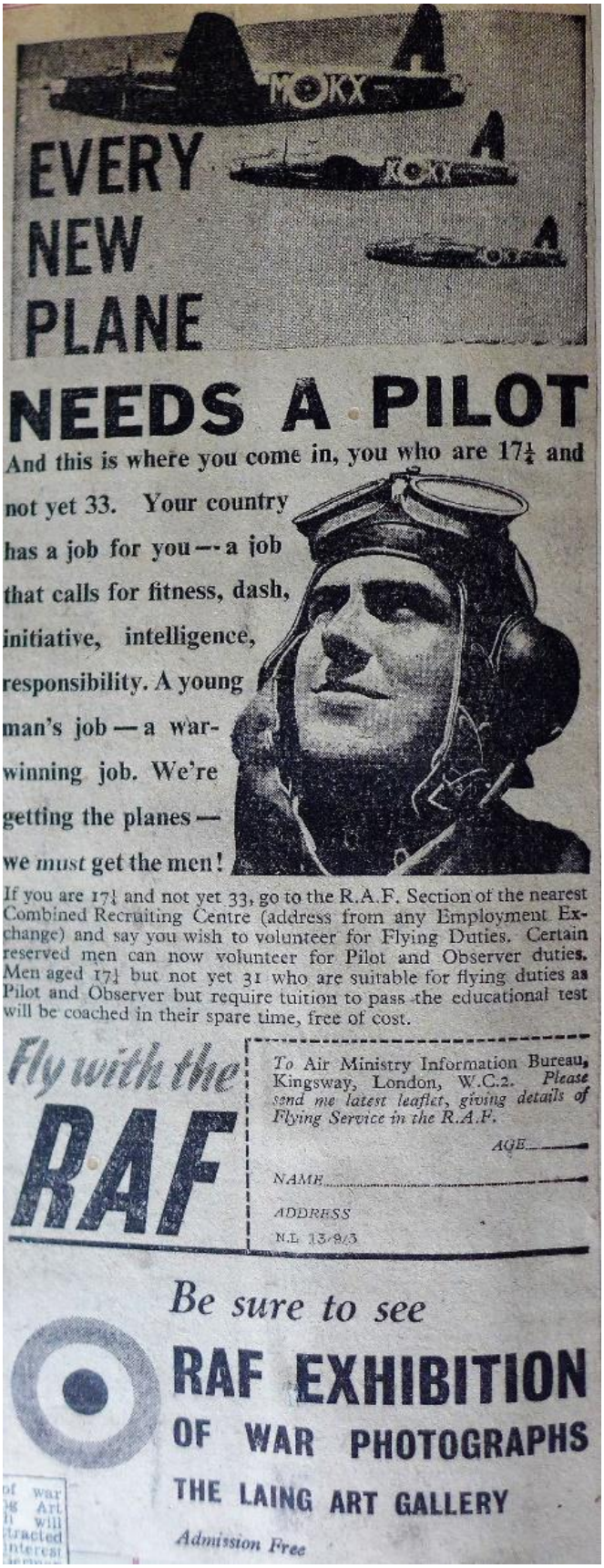

Fig.8. Advertisement for a RAF Exhibition at the Laing. *Newcastle Journal and North Mail,* 09-05-1941

it portrayed ‘atrocities’ and was ‘not allowed to children.’[193]

One wonders why CBS’ minor reluctance to display propaganda appeared at a time when he had achieved higher levels of respectability in the community, and in which the Laing also had alternative material to exhibit from its own permanent collection. The reasons may be linked to Sir Arthur Lambert’s influence acting both as a Chairman and as Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, or even to the fact that these exhibitions kept the gallery populated whilst allowing the permanent collections to be sheltered away. Also, local society seemed to accept better the fact that the Laing remained open if it was because of serving a utilitarian function. Indeed, the only wartime exhibitions provoking negative reactions were those of modern art. In any case, instead of opposing, CBS adopted the strategy of complementing the war-themed exhibitions with art-related displays organised by the Laing itself. This reinforcement would explain the huge number of exhibitions held and would also prove the gallery’s faithfulness to its original aims, no matter the extra effort due to staff shortage.

The second block (art-themed shows) amounted to up to forty-five of the eighty-five exhibitions held, of which the Laing directly organised thirty-two, thus meaning an average of over five exhibitions per year, in addition to the war-themed exhibitions. The most popular of this group were the annual Northern Counties exhibitions, which, unlike the time of the First World War, were never discontinued. Against all predictions, the war increased the quality of the works presented and the artists’ participation, because several local painters who had already settled in London returned to Newcastle after their studios had been bombed, being joined by artists from other regions displaced in the North-East because of the war. Each of the annual selection processes collected over 1,000 works, and about 600 were selected for display each year (see pp.246-269). About the organizational difficulties, CBS commented: ‘I doubt if any other exhibition on such a scale will be held in this country during the war.’[194] The press agreed, noting the ‘praiseworthy efforts, quite reminiscent of a peace-time show.’[195]

[193] LCM 22-02-1944. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.245.
[194] Anon (08-02-1941). ‘Laing Art Gallery exhibits.’ *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[195] Anon, (22-08-1942). ‘Northern Artists Exhibition.’ *Northern Echo*, n.p.

However, besides the Northern Counties Exhibitions, only the Ashington Group exhibition (1941) can be considered as a major art show, as the rest of the art exhibitions dealt with crafts made by collectives like the Boy Scouts, Women's Institutes or the HM Forces. Also, shorter art exhibitions displaying engravings and watercolours of the permanent collection were used as 'fillers' between propaganda displays. Actually, the most relevant art exhibitions of the period were not organized directly by the Laing, but arranged through CEMA, which tried to 'initiate the provinces into the activities of the modern art world' through touring exhibitions completed with educational activities like guided visits, lectures and film displays.[196] Through CEMA, the Laing hosted a total of ten exhibitions, of which eight dealt with modern art. Similar exhibitions had been arranged in partnership with the British Institute for Adult Education since the 1930s, successfully taking place in smaller towns lacking art facilities, but getting the inhabitants of Newcastle into modern art proved to be more challenging, and the first of these exhibitions, called 'Art for the People. 40 Modern Painters' (1942), provoked angry reactions.[197] Letters to the *Newcastle Journal* complained about the bad quality of the artworks (signed by Sickert, Paul Nash, Stanley Spencer or Augustus John), the difficulty in understanding the subjects, the squandering of tax money in wartime or the scant educational value of the exhibition. Someone even suggested that the Laing was getting a commission, an accusation based on the fact that the paintings were for sale: 'is any commission paid to any person or body in Newcastle on these sales: if so, how much and to whom? Is any charge made to the Institute of Adult Education for the use of the Laing Gallery for what is at any rate partly a commercial undertaking?'[198] Similar reactions took place in the post-war period, although they did not manage to affect the Laing's collecting policy, which since the 1930s had been mostly focused on Modern art (see pp.220-229). The reception of modern art during wartime seems to have been irregular in different cities: whilst Leicester voted the Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland and John Piper Exhibition (1942) 'the best

[196] Anon (23-04-1942). 'Modern Art on show in Newcastle.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p. CEMA was created in 1940, and some authors have seen this moment as a milestone in the British government's responsibility towards patronage of the arts. See for instance Hewison, R. (1995) *Culture and Consensus. England, art and politics since 1940.* London: Methuen, p.xv.
[197] LCM 03-07-1942. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.230.
[198] "Quick" (04-05-1942). 'Laing Art Show Queries.' *Newcastle Journal and North Mail.* n.n

display in twelve months', exhibitions of abstract painting in Dundee (1943) were received with 'bewilderment' and even hostility.[199]

Wartime activities

Wartime exhibitions were complemented by concerts, lectures, and film displays. Interestingly, the moment when the didactic activities were most relevant, and when the Laing was closest to CBS' educational aims, was precisely when it was bereft of its permanent collections. This apparent contradiction between both of the curator's main concerns (collection and education), evidences that the Laing's influence as a cultural generator for Newcastle was independent of its art collection. CBS' awareness on this matter can be found in these words: 'during this time, the gallery has played an ever-increasing part in the lives of the people. At no time has it been so popular or done so much to stimulate a wide interest in art and cultural matters.'[200] Similarly, for many provincial galleries, the withdrawal of their collections became an opportunity for experimentation and gave the space to test the recommendations of the Miers and Markham Reports (see pp.1-6).[201]

The Laing's wartime activities followed a pattern common for most provincial galleries. There were the MoI's propaganda films, with titles like 'The White Eagle', 'Sailors without Uniform' or 'Winged Messengers'.[202] And also, CEMA lunch-hour concerts, which CBS praised as a means to attract visitors to the exhibitions and to maintain the interest in the gallery. Those gave people the opportunity to listen to live music at a time when the possibilities to attend evening concerts were limited because of black-out and restricted leisure hours. Indeed, they became so popular that the audience did not fit into the room and had to stand in the neighbouring galleries.[203] As meals could not be provided because of rationing, a temporary canteen was installed and the public was encouraged to bring sandwiches, creating a 'delightful air of informality' that 'pervades the gallery when concert-goers are seen

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[199] Mc Arthur, E. (2005). *The Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) and the Development of the Arts Council in Scotland: Background, Politics and Policy 1919-1947.* (Doctoral thesis, University of Dundee, Dundee, U.K.), p.281. Retrieved from https://discovery.dundee.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/the-council-for-the-encouragement-of-music-and-the-arts-cema-and-

[200] LCM 26-04-1946. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.30-33.

[201] Ibid as 100, p.156-162.

[202] LCM 28-11-1941. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.224.

[203] Anon (26-09-1941). *The Shields Evening News,* n.p.

drinking their tea, eating their sandwiches and happily chatting to their friends in the half hour before the concert begins', with an audience 'of soldiers, some WRENS, clergymen, shop assistants, office workers, young and old and a busy housewife with her baby daughter'.[204] However, the concerts' popularity was a double-edged sword, because CEMA supported events only until a regular audience was established: 'evidence of public demand would then encourage local authorities to take over financial responsibility, while CEMA reduced its grant'.[205] For the Laing, this reduction took place in 1944, descending from £200 to £130. As the concerts had an approximate cost of £150 and the Newcastle Council did not seem interested in cooperating, CBS contacted other museums to find out if their concerts were rate-supported, as it turned out to be for Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool and Sheffield.[206] The Laing finally managed to secure £50 from the Education Committee, and £50 from the Council, which enabled the concerts to continue. But the return of the permanent collection and the rise of musician's salaries after the war, plus the difficulty for the staff having to deal with the extra work caused the concerts to stop being viable, so they were discontinued in 1947.[207]

Another significant CEMA-related wartime novelty was the Exhibit of the Month, consisting of a monthly special exhibition of a famous artwork lent by other galleries or private collectors. The first work to arrive to the Laing (1944) was John Crome's (1768-1821) *Yarmouth Beach and Mill* (n.d.). Works by Rubens, Van Dyck, Pissarro, Rembrandt or Constable followed. Like the Lunch-hour Concerts, the scheme stopped in 1947, but the experience formed the germ for two interesting future projects: the first, still in wartime, was the Loan of the Month to the King Edward VII School of Art, which allowed students to come into closer contact with a monthly artwork from the Laing collection.[208] The second was the resumption, already in the 1950s, of a similar scheme featuring, instead, young artists.

But the nucleus of the Laing's wartime educational activities was aimed at children. At the outbreak of the war, children were evacuated, only to be soon returned to

[204] 'Our Music Critic' (19-09-1941). 'Lunch Hour Concert. Popular.' *Northern Echo,* n.p.
[205] Ibid as 176, p.91.
[206] LCM 29-09-1944. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.2.
[207] LCM 07-03-1947. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.62.
[208] LCM 24-11-1944. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.6.

Newcastle owing to the absence of air raids. As most schools had closed, arrangements were made with the Newcastle Board of Education to hold activities at the Laing until proper accommodation was found. This led to a series of talks about painting, local history, architecture and industrial art, 'illustrated as far as possible by means of the collections in the museum'.[209] The children also made 'copies of pictures in the gallery […], in order to train their artistic appreciation and their powers of observation and concentration', and attended concerts preceded by talks from the artists.[210] After the breakdown of the Government's evacuation Plan and the curtailment of educational facilities in 1940, the Laing started providing lectures for groups of pupils accompanied by their teachers, who visited the gallery when they could not attend school.[211] The scheme succeeded and the Laing was requested to arrange similar talks for graduate students at Kings' College who were taking the teaching Diploma. CBS highlighted how 'a valuable link was established between the work of the Museum and the work of the educational Authorities', thus showing the first steps towards a contemporary approach to museum education.[212] A similar situation existed in provincial museums throughout the country, so the Board of Education introduced grants to provide educational services, leading in some cases to the appointment of museum education officers.[213]

Returning to normal

The last months of wartime at the Laing are connected with local ambitious plans of urban reconstruction. Although Newcastle had suffered relatively little in the bombings, since the early 1940s it began to be considered that its Georgian and Victorian layout would offer problems for the growing traffic. The Council used the Laing to receive feedback on the population's feelings on this matter with the exhibitions 'Britain Builds. Tyneside Housing Exhibition' (1942), which included 'photographs, plans and designs of Tyneside past, present and future', and 'Newcastle's Town Planning' (1943), which showed models of future plans,

[209] Anon (01-05-1940). 'Talks for Newcastle School Children.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[210] Ibid.
[211] LCM 31-05-1940. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.210.
[212] LCM 28-11-1941. TWA, MD/NC/129/5, p.224.
[213] Wignall, E.W., ed. (1944). *Museums Journal,* vol.44, p.197.

especially regarding the Barras Bridge area, where the new Civic Centre was planned to be built.[214]

Newcastle's post-war remodelling plans affected the Laing directly, also having repercussions on the expansion projects related to the Joicey Museum (see pp.51-72). Whilst discussions regarding 'a new Laing' - proposed to be built inside the future Civic Centre - were taking place, works were needed to restore the original building to its pre-war state. The extraordinary expenditure - increased by the post-war prices - was covered by the War Damage Commissioners, but the reinstatement fee took long to arrive and the estimates for 1947-48 were still dealing with it.[215] In addition to the works in the building, the artworks lent to the Laing during the war had to be returned to their owners, and the cleaning, reframing and relocation of hundreds of pictures from the permanent collection – which returned in October 1945 - was pending. As newspapers noted, 'a task of some magnitude still awaits CBS in the Museum, whose aisles are packed with cases containing exhibits returned to their home after the war, and now awaiting distribution and arrangement'.[216] The accumulation of work forced the gallery to close between November 1945 and February 1946. Unlike the First World War post-war celebrations, no offers of commemorative exhibitions arrived, and the usual exhibition policy was soon recovered, as well as the pre-war calendar of between five and seven temporary exhibitions per year.

In another vein, and similarly to 1918, the end of the war brought good news for the permanent collection. Two important donations arrived: Luke Clennell's *Tynemouth Priory* (1813-1814) bequeathed by Miss A.J. Thompson, and *The Catapult* (1868), by Edward J. Poynter (1836-1919), offered by Viscount Runciman (see p.285).[217] Besides, the accumulated £45 from the Glover Bequest were used for purchases.[218] The recovery of the pre-war routines was completed with the reinstatement of the monthly Committee meetings in June 1946. As barely a year had passed since the surrender of Germany and only a few months after the war was completely over, the return to normal was even faster than in 1918, perhaps due to lessons learned from

[214] Anon (06-07-1943). 'Newcastle of the future'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[215] LCM 03-02-1947. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.58.
[216] Anon (22-10-1945). 'Laing's Record'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[217] LCM 29-06-1945. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.11.
[218] Ibid, p.13.

previous experiences and the more consolidated nature of the permanent collection by that time.

E. POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION

For the Laing, the twelve years between the end of the Second World War and CBS' death in April 1957 were a complex period in which the plans of post-war reconstruction had to be confronted with unfamiliar historical circumstances for Newcastle. They also brought a bittersweet ending to the curator's career, due to the need to abandon dreams like the Joicey Museum, the lack of recognition for his work and a certain loss of importance of the Laing amongst provincial galleries in connection with post-war difficulties, with Newcastle's own loss of status within the country's economy and with the growth of the Hatton as a complementary and sometimes competitive art gallery. On the positive side, curatorial decisions gained independence with respect to the Committee, partly thanks to Collingwood Stevenson's progressive status within the gallery structure, and both curators were invigorated by an exciting exhibition programme reflecting a changing era both for art and for British society.

Development plans

During the last years of the Second World War and in the immediate post-war period, CBS wrote several reports informing the Laing Committee about his development plans for the gallery after the return of the collection and the resumption of the normal functions. These related to the integral management of the Laing and comprised the staff, the collection, the temporary exhibitions and the educational activities. Unfortunately, the British recovery process after the Second World War was not at all comparable to that after the end of the First World War, which, together with the lack of necessary municipal or State support, resulted in the vast majority of these plans being abandoned. However, from a current point of view, the analysis of CBS' goals provides an understanding of how different his professional legacy could have been in his last years, had there been more favourable historical circumstances.

Regarding the artworks, CBS had the dream of 'completing the collection' - especially the oil paintings section - as the culmination of his career. Therefore, shortly after the war, he requested the resumption of his annual London visits.[219] Such visits in this period would no longer have the function of requesting loans (because most of the post-war temporary exhibitions were either organised by the Arts Council or had local subjects), but would serve to visit dealers who could send works to the Laing for their Committee's inspection and purchase. The petition seems not to have succeeded, since there is no mention of these trips being resumed in the following years, nor any report of the curator in this regard.

Financially, the collection development plans obtained greater support, with significant increases despite Britain's difficult post-war economic situation. Although the £500 annual Council purchase fund had been restored after the end of the war, this amount covered frames and display cases as well. This circumstance, together with the large number of artworks donated during wartime and requiring frames, meant that few purchases could be made in the immediate post-war period, most of them being reproductions or sketches by local authors. After realising that £340 of the £500 amount for purchases belonging to 1948 had been spent on frames, the Laing Committee agreed to request from Newcastle Council an annual amount of £1,000 for purchases, and a separate item of £350 for cases and frames, on the grounds that 'as the Art Gallery played a very significant part in the cultural life of the city, the amount of £500 hitherto used for the purchase of works of art and also for the purchase of fittings, frames, etc (the prices of which were now much higher) was altogether too meagre.'[220] CBS' letters to other galleries asking them about their annual amount for purchases evidence his role in this decision (fig.9).
As a result of the request, an annual increase of £250 took place in 1949, and a further £250 were added in 1950, making a total of £1,000.[221] Good news arrived also in 1951, when the Newcastle Council Financial Committee included a clause in a Parliamentary Bill providing for 'power to set up a fund for the purchase of works of art or articles of historic or scientific interest'.[222] The Finance Committee agreed to

[219] LCM 03-10-1947. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.74.
[220] LCM 26-02-1948. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.86.
[221] LCM 09-02-1950. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.124.
[222] LCM 07-07-1951. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.158.

GALLERY	AMOUNT
Manchester	£2,000
Leicester	£2,000
Sheffield	£1,000
Liverpool	£1,000
Hull	£1,000
Birmingham	Pictures: £5,000
	Cases and frames £650
Aberdeen	Pictures: £300
	Cases and frames: £150
	Interest from capital sums of £52,000
Plymouth	£700
Southampton	Pictures: £4,000
	Cases and frames: £200
Bristol	Pictures: £1,000
	Cases and frames: £200
	Wills Fund: £500-600
Leeds	Pictures: £2,000
	Cases and frames: £300

Fig.9.Data collected by CBS regarding the annual budget for purchases in British provincial galleries. TWA MD/NC/129/6.

limit this fund to the product of 1/5d rate (approximately £2,000 annually), which would allow 'the purchase, from time to time, of an important masterpiece to enhance the status of the Gallery and its collection.'[223] It is unknown whether this fund had any relationship with the further increase of £250 annually taking place from 1955, but these improvements indeed influenced the kind of artworks bought during the last years of CBS' career.

Art and education

Besides the plans for the gallery's needs - which the curator believed could be delivered by the creation of the Joicey Museum (see pp.69-72) - CBS devoted much time to think about the Laing's usefulness in connection with post-war employment opportunities and economic growth in Newcastle. The fact that many of the city's traditional industries had undergone changes or been displaced during the war provoked a crisis in the financial structure of the Northeast, and CBS felt that the Laing could help post-war reconstruction by displaying ideas regarding the creative use of industrial design, of which he proudly announced Newcastle's excellent tradition.[224]

Although many of the wartime educational activities had been discontinued, CBS' post-war plans still believed in their viability. For children, he proposed the creation of a Schools Museum Service which would circulate 'to the City Schools special loans of pictures, reproductions, lantern slides, museum objects and collections having local historical interest'.[225] For adults, instead, he focused on activities oriented to industry, in the belief that the industrial past of the city had the potential to become a means of future growth. The educational programme was intended to be complemented by more specialized resources aimed at researchers, like catalogues of the museum section and the oil paintings, similar to the one prepared for the watercolour collection, and 'regular graded courses of lectures on the history of art and on art appreciation.'[226] More general visitors would be provided, instead, with a

[223] Ibid.
[224] Anguix, L. (forthcoming) 'The North-East can make it. Post-war design exhibitions at the Laing Art Gallery'. *Journal of Design History.*
[225] Stevenson, C.B. (26-04-1946). Report about the staff. TWA, MD/NC/129/6 p.30-33.
[226] Ibid.

handbook and 'information about new acquisitions to the collections, exhibitions, lectures, concerts and other activities of the department'.[227]

These ambitious plans were hampered by the rehanging of the permanent collections, which once again showed the lack of space for educational activities. As mentioned, both the Exhibit of the Month and the Lunch-hour Concerts had to be interrupted in 1947. Most provincial galleries experienced a similar situation, the majority them having to stop musical programmes since the 1950s.[228] In addition, the Laing had to give up the talks, workshops and film projections taking place while the galleries were empty. CBS' sentiments in this regard, as well as his hopes for change, are evident in this letter rejecting an application for a lecture:

> Unfortunately, we have no lecture room here and it is felt that the lectures would interfere with visitors who come for the purpose of seeing and studying the pictures. […] People are very disappointed when they have probably come from considerable distances to see an exhibition and they are told that it is impossible on account of some activity taking place in the Gallery concerned. This complaint has been made in many occasions during the lunch-time concerts which we started merely as a war-time activity. [...] In the extension of the gallery it is hoped that a lecture theatre will be provided.[229]

CBS' continuous support of a wider conception of art galleries differed from the position adopted by most provincial curators, whose positioning towards the galleries' educational role suffered a regression in post-war times towards 'a more individualist focus on the traditional functions of collecting and conservation.'[230] Even Collingwood Stevenson, on his thesis for the curatorial diploma of the MA (1955), stated that 'education should be the aim for museums, but not for art galleries' and sustained that 'art does not exist for education' (see pp.172-176).[231] The Laing's Assistant Curator shared those same views at the 1955 MA Conference, when he described wider cultural activities for the gallery during wartime as 'irrelevant' and

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[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid as 100, p.294.
[229] Stevenson, C.B. (26-07-1946). Letter to Mr. Abrahart. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.39.
[230] Ibid as 100, p.294.
[231] Stevenson, C.M. (1955). *A policy for a provincial Art Gallery.* (Thesis for the Diploma of the Museums Association, U.K.), p.9. MSA.

asserted that ‘under normal circumstances it was not part of the proper functions of an art gallery to run concerts.’[232]

CBS’ post-war goal ‘to develop a wider appreciation and knowledge of Art and the part it plays in the lives of the people’ and to help the gallery become ‘a greater educational and cultural force in the city’ was achieved only fragmentarily, probably because of the always insufficient staff, space and budget.[233] Like on previous occasions, CBS had gathered inspiration from the writings of the MA, concretely from the MA’s reconstruction report, *Museums and Art Galleries: a National Service* (1945) which relied heavily on a national museum scheme supported by central government funds, featuring an ideal scenario which never took place.[234] As seen in the Laing’s early history, the Newcastle Council was neither likely to provide the support needed for that development. Consequently, between 1945 and 1957, only a talk offered by the influential art critic and broadcaster David Sylvester was directly organized by the Laing. Besides, there were occasional talks connected with various exhibitions, some illustrated lectures organised through the Arts Council, and a lantern session by the art historian Eric Newton organized by the Federation of Northern Arts Societies, which was so popular that the public had to sit in the adjoining rooms. The Schools Museum Service had a similar fate, being limited to sporadic tours of the gallery, the loan of colour reproductions and a few children's art appreciation classes in 1957. The same happened with the film displays, which only occurred on six occasions, and only thanks to the Arts Council, although, again, their large audiences indicate a wider demand that the Laing, with its limitations, could not fulfill. The success of these activities proves the pressing need for lecture rooms and evidences how the development of the Laing’s educational functions was hampered by the lack of an adequate infrastructure, which the Joicey Museum would have solved, thus improving the artistic education of North-eastern audiences.

The staff shortage

The Laing’s post-war development was also hampered by the lack of sufficient and specialized staff. As the problem’s roots related both to the lack of space and the

[232] Constable, W.G. (1955). ‘Museums in a Changing Age: Where do we go from here?’ *Museums Journal,* vol. 55, p.259-262.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Wallis, F.S., ed. (1945). ‘Museums and Art Galleries: a National Service.’ *Museums Journal,* vol. 45, p.33-45.

funding difficulties - because there were not enough funds to issue new contracts, nor enough spaces to serve as offices - CBS waited until the negotiations of the Joicey Museum were unblocked before requesting an extension of personnel. When he did, he counted both on the space of the new museum and on its associated funds:

> For years the full development of the Art Gallery and Museum Service has been hampered and restricted by the fact that it has been impossible to engage an adequate staff on account of lack of accommodation. The Joicey Museum having now become a near possibility, and the suggestion having been made that it should contain an administrative wing for the use of both buildings, there now seems to be an opportunity of rectifying this very unsatisfactory state of affairs.[235]

The need of staff was not only related to the management of the new museum but was also seen as the only way to maintain the educational activities started during the war and to deal with the gifts arrived in those years, which could not be displayed because they had not been classified. Research of the permanent collection was also needed because

> every picture has to be identified, dated and the name of the artist ascertained. […] The information has to be gathered, condensed, and reproduced in the form of clear, concise, accurate descriptive labels before the pictures and objects in a gallery and museum can be made intelligible and of educational and cultural significance to the general public.[236]

Based on those needs, CBS recommended the promotion of two of the existing employees, in order to benefit from their practical experience, and the creation of two more specialized roles: firstly, an Organiser of the School Museum Service, who would be 'in charge of special circulating loan collections […], to be sent on loan to the schools of the city for a period of about one month'; and secondly, a Guide Lecturer, who would act as a liaison officer between the gallery and the public. Inspired by the figure of the guide lecturers that had accompanied the wartime Arts Council's exhibitions, the curator wished for 'a trained and competent person ready

[235] Ibid as 231.
[236] Ibid

and willing to answer questions, supply information and make suggestions' whose aim would be to 'stimulate a lively and enthusiastic interest in art'.[237]

Although these recommendations were approved by the committee, the staff numbers were not ultimately increased, thus forcing the curtailment of the educational activities in order to deal with the accumulation of work accrued during the war. Moreover, the insufficient updating of definitions of the staff's functions, delayed by Newcastle Council to avoid increased salary expenditures, left the Laing employees underpaid, working on the verge of legal limits and lacking the training needed for the tasks they performed, all reasons why the Laing received several trade union warnings, noting that the gallery attendants - who were placed under the same classification as lavatory cleaners or street sweepers - were acting instead as skilled technical assistants responsible for the care of works of art.[238] This problem was not exclusive to Newcastle: the *Survey of Provincial Museums and Galleries* (known as the Rosse Report) of 1963 denounced that museum staff were placed at the two lowest local government grades, thus leading to significant rates of abandonment of the profession, the creation of skills gaps and the disruption of knowledge transfer.[239]

Contact with other institutions

Collaboration with Northern museums continued in the post-war years, still keeping the Laing in a central role, although the practical scope of the FMNC was limited. An example of this was visible in the idea of organising a series of Federation Loan Circulating Exhibitions, to which each gallery would contribute a few artworks. Although four of these exhibitions had already been planned in 1947, by the time CBS died only one had taken place, dealing with living Northern Artists (1957). Meetings connected with the Festival of Britain Exhibition (1951) were more successful, with arrangements to exchange loans of regional artists and to divide the subjects between the participating galleries in order to avoid overlapping.[240]

[237] Ibid
[238] LCM 15-11-1951. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.171.
[239] Ibid as 100, p.284.
[240] Anon (21-03-1950). 'Museums to show "locals"'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

A new post-war collaboration started with the Federation of Northern Art Societies, whose foundation in 1947 preceded the creation of other Regional Art Associations in Britain in the late 1950s. The Federation's mainly amateur character had initially discouraged the Laing to engage, as the gallery was already being criticised for allowing too many non-professional artists in its Northern Counties exhibitions. Therefore, the Federation's initial bond was established with the Shipley, where they developed annual exhibitions from 1948 to 1956. By then, its expansion had provoked an 'ever increasing difficulty in arranging a concise yet comprehensive exhibition', so they approached the Laing asking for exhibition space.[241] As expected, press reviews found most works 'calendar-like' and complained that the art societies lacked young members and contact with modern art.[242] But such criticisms did not discourage Collingwood Stevenson, and collaboration with the Federation continued after CBS' death, eventually replacing the Northern Counties exhibitions (see pp.268-270).

Post-war collaborations also comprised the loan of artworks to other institutions. Unlike previous years, when most works were loaned to museums in the region, in the 1950s the Laing's pictures travelled abroad to represent Britain in international exhibitions. Eight of the Laing watercolours toured Australia and New Zealand between 1947 and 1950 with the British Empire Loan Exhibition Society and the British Council took the *Landscape with Bridge* (c.1775) by Thomas Gainsborough to Hamburg, Oslo, Stockholm and Copenhagen, and *Carrying Hay* (n.d.), by Peter de Wint (1784-1849) to the MoMA.[243] When the Arts Council restarted its 'Picture of the Month' scheme in 1956, Laing's pictures were included. Loans to other regional and national galleries also gained notoriety, with examples like the Bewick-related material lent to the V&A for the bicentenary exhibition of the artist, or the loan of Martin's *Arthur and Aegle* (1849) and *The destruction of Sodom And Gomorrah* (1852) to the Whitechapel Gallery.[244] Despite the huge sizes of these paintings, which made transport troublesome, also *The Bard* (1817) travelled to London for the exhibition 'The First Hundred Years of the RA' amidst the sort of 'Martin's fever'

[241] W.E.J. (08-02-1957). 'Round North-East art galleries.' *Northern Echo,* n.p.
[242] Anon (16-02-1957). 'Over-complacency among North-Eastern painters?' *Northern Echo,* n.p.
[243] LCM 30-09-1955. TWA, MD/NC/129/7, p.35.
[244] Anon (22-09-1953). 'Treasure Loans.' *Newcastle Journal,* n.p.

started with the artist's exhibition held at the Laing for the Festival of Britain.[245] Other galleries requesting pictures from the permanent collections were Leicester, Birmingham, Scarborough, Nottingham and Sheffield.

Curation

Between 1945 and 1957, CBS and Collingwood Stevenson's curatorial team achieved its greatest autonomy. After the return of the permanent collection and the creation of a stable collaboration with the Arts Council guaranteeing periodic loan exhibitions, the committee's supervision relaxed. From 1952, meetings were spaced at a bi-monthly or quarterly frequency, and in them CBS spent more time describing decisions already taken than requesting permission for new ones. The changes meant more time for working on the permanent collection, which in these years – despite the staff shortage remaining unresolved – was rearranged and documented thoroughly.

Curatorial independence for small purchases continued, leading to the acquisition of the *Portrait of Thomas Bewick* (1814) by William Nicholson (1781–1844), that CBS purchased with just the Chairman's approval. In 1954, when a painting labelled as *A banquet* (artist unknown) appeared in the catalogue of a local sale, on his own initiative, CBS researched and purchased it 'on account of its local historical interest' after discovering that it had been painted by Henry Perlee Parker (1795-1873) for the opening of the Grainger Market in 1835.[246] A similar situation took place in 1956, when *The Fieldfare* (n.d.) by J. Bewick (1753-1828) was obtained at a local sale. It is to wonder, however, if the presence of the well-known curator in the auction rooms affected the prices of the pictures in any way. This well-established reputation contrasts, nevertheless, with the bureaucratic difficulties CBS met when trying to develop his network. Besides the cease of the annual visits to London, another striking case was the denial of permission by the Council for the curator to attend the 1955 MA meeting: although he had applied one year ahead, the Council's delay in responding prevented his attendance.[247]

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[245] Anguix, L. (2020). 'The Festival of Britain at the Laing Art Gallery'. *Friends News. Newsletter for the Friends of the Laing Art Gallery,* vol.132, pp.7-11.
[246] LCM 30-07-1954. TWA, MD/NC/129/7, p.4.
[247] LCM 28-01-1955. TWA, MD/NC/129/7, p.13.

The permanent collection in post-war years

The war had a positive impact on the Laing's permanent collections, with 3,000 pictures given between 1939 and 1948.[248] From the Nettlefold's gift, which benefited several British art galleries, the Laing received *Salisbury Cathedral* (1831) by Constable (1776-1837), *Pandy Mill* (1843) by David Cox (1783-1859) and two watercolours by Edward Dayes (1763-1804) and Thomas Malton (1748-1804). Soon after the war, Wilfred Hall's bequest (1953) brought four valuable Greek vases and one of the Laing's masterpieces, Holman Hunt's *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (see p.291). In the same year, the Arts Council presented *Autumn Landscape* (1950), by William Gear (1915–97), which CBS had tried to get when exhibited at the Laing the previous year.[249] The gift, however, did not make everybody happy, and critics found it difficult to understand:

> Put your head on one side, then the other. Put it between your legs and view it upside down. It will probably give you a pain in the neck or bring on cerebral thrombosis. Having done all this, if you still cannot appreciate it, go down on your hands and knees and hang your head with shame. You have no soul. [250]

In order to satisfy more conservative audiences, the Laing's membership of the NACF doubled its subscription to £10.10.0 per annum upon the Fund's appeal on their 50th Anniversary (1953). As a reward, *Perdita* (c.1783), by Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), was gifted in 1955. The following year, the most important monetary bequest of the period - the W.B. Bond Bequest, totalling £3,309.0.4 for the purchase of pottery and furniture - arrived, by a fortunate coincidence, just after the reopening of the museum section.[251] The last significant gift of CBS' period came in 1957 and was John Martin's *Haydon Bridge* (n.d.).

Post-war changes in the British art market, together with the increase in the funding available for purchases, with the fact that many of the gifts and bequests dealt with older paintings of national relevance and with CBS' anxiety to 'complete the permanent collection', had as a consequence an evident shift to modern art in the

[248] LCM 22-10-1948. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.90.
[249] See 'Post-war temporary exhibitions' on this chapter, pp.142-145.
[250] Casey, J.W. (29-4-1953). 'Art in the (very) abstract.' *Newcastle Journal,* n.p.
[251] LCM 28-09-1956. TWA, MD/NC/129/7, p.64.

Laing purchasing policy during CBS' last years. As early as 1948, the curator encouraged this new direction, so that the Laing would 'not lag behind the great galleries in the country. Moreover, many students and connoisseurs of art had asked that modern paintings might be included in the collections at the gallery.'[252] This appeal to gap-filling (a dominant pursuit for regional galleries) was so effective that, in the same meeting, the Laing purchased two pictures by Edward Wadsworth (1889-1949) - *Le Havre* (1939) and *Marine Set* (1936), for £230 -, *The Lovers* by Stanley Spencer (£450, see p.287), *Yellow Tulips and Statuette* (1912) by S.J. Peploe (1871-1935) for £225 and *Still-life with Fish* (c.1948) by Ruskin Spear (1911-1990) for £70. By the end of the same year, CBS mentioned the enthusiasm of the audiences over the new acquisitions and asked the Committee to continue 'their' policy of acquiring modern painting, 'so that the reputation of the Gallery might be enhanced and that it might take its place among the great galleries in the country.'[253] He then recommended buying *Creole Girl* (1923-24) by Matthew Smith (1879-1959), for £400, and *Girl with Mirror* (1942-45) by Victor Pasmore (1908–98) for £200. As the annual budget for purchases had already been spent, the first painting was acquired by paying £300 in 1948 and £100 in 1949, whilst the second one was bought through the M.M. Ufford Bequest. The fact that the Committee agreed to spend this money - which had been kept since 1945 - in modern art proves the commitment to this new policy, which aligned with the one followed by national galleries such as the Tate and regional galleries such as Birmingham, Bristol or Leeds.[254] Nonetheless the next relevant purchases (1951) had a more traditional cut, which can be explained in the context of the revival of North-Eastern artists, as the chosen works were John Martin's *The Bard* (see p.288) and the aforementioned *Portrait of Thomas Bewick*, whose purchase was related to the imminent celebration of Bewick's Bicentenary Exhibition.

Purchases in 1952 mixed the trends of the two previous years, through the acquisition of two very different works: *North Devon* (n.d.), by David Bomberg (1890-1957) and a seventeenth-century silver flagon with a turbulent story which was hurriedly rescued from an Antique Dealers' Fair 'where it would almost certainly be

[252] LCM 23-01-1948. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.83.
[253] LCM 03-12-1948. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.100.
[254] Ibid as 110, p.88.

bought for America.'[255] The £1,250 requested was clearly too much for the Laing budget, so financial assistance was obtained from the National Arts Collections Fund.[256] This successful year was completed by the commission to T.W. Pattison - author of the first large lunette decoration in the 1920s - of a mural for the entrance hall.[257] 1953 followed a similar pattern, with the issue of a second wall decoration commission from Byron Dawson (author of another of the 1920s lunette decorations), and the purchase of a *Marcus Curtius* (n.d.) mistakenly attributed to John Martin and two paintings by Augustus John (1878-1961).

Both periods of enthusiasm for John Martin and modern art seemed to have vanished by 1954, when the Laing declined Earl Grey Martin's *Alpheus and Arethusa* (1832) and invested the annual funds instead in *The Alban Hills* (1751–57), by Richard Wilson (1714-82). The reopening of the museum section was evident in the only discussion about the policy that took place in these years, when the Committee members asked for more museum objects to be bought.[258] The last pictures purchased in CBS' life were connected to local art, and they comprised *Edinburgh* (n.d.), by T.M. Richardson Jr., a series of watercolours by Clennell, and *Briar and Hawthorn* (1952) by Lawrence Gowing (1918-1991), bought directly from the artist while he was Professor of Fine Art at Newcastle University, probably to silence the - somewhat uninformed- complaints that the Laing had not purchased any Northern living artist since before the war.[259]

Post-war temporary exhibitions

Over ninety exhibitions were organized between 1945 and 1957, either by the gallery itself or by various agencies, many of which were written about by a growing group of local art critics, accompanied by talks and visited by large audiences. Not even the forced closure of the museum section to serve as a warehouse can be considered as a handicap, since it favoured to a certain extent the quality of the exhibitions held and the almost exclusive dedication of the gallery to artistic content. Even the museum cases which had been forcefully placed in the picture galleries upstairs had

[255] LCM 30-5-1952. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.187.
[256] LCM 25-7-1952. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.191.
[257] Ibid.
[258] LCM 20-04-1956. TWA, MD/NC/129/7, p.52
[259] Anon (31-08-1956). 'West Hartlepool student's miniature "design fair"'. *Northern Echo,* n.p.

a positive use in connection to some of the art exhibitions, such as the Tyneside-made pottery, glass and silver displayed for the Festival of Britain exhibition (1951), which benefited from the affluence of public to the picture galleries and the 'ideal viewing conditions thanks to the roof lighting.'[260]

Although CBS' early dream had been to have fewer temporary exhibitions once the permanent collection was complete, he abandoned this plan after realising that temporary events were the perfect way to maintain an interest in the gallery and to attract different kinds of audiences. In this aspect, the support of the Arts Council was instrumental, bringing nearly thirty exhibitions to the Laing in the immediate post-war. Although they covered different periods, the ones dealing with modern art caused the strongest reactions, such as those provoked by the *Sixty Paintings for '51* exhibition, where Gear's *Autumn Landscape* was exhibited.[261] Local press' reviews did not differ much from those obtained by CEMA's wartime exhibitions of modern art: the paintings were classified as 'obscure', 'monstrosities', and received comments like 'some of the seven-year-olds I know can do no worse' or 'I asked some of the bright young men for enlightenment, but all I got was a blithe burble about colour combinations and design and jargon borrowed from the art of music and applied to painting.'[262]

Unfortunately, the Government retrenchment programme started in 1952 brought further cuts on arts founding and forced the closure of the Arts Council's regional offices, including the one situated on Newcastle Quayside. From that moment on, the number of Arts Council exhibitions held in provincial galleries fell by over two-thirds, provoking a crisis in the revival of culture in regional centres, with a decline in the number of temporary exhibitions and in the arrangement of educational activities.[263] But the Laing did its best to compensate for the gap by arranging its own continuous flow of local exhibitions, with punctual help from the City Council or Northern culture-related institutions like the FMNC, the Federation of Northern Arts

[260] LCM 06-04-1951, MD/NC/129/6, p.154.

[261] As part of the Arts Council's contribution to the Festival of Britain, sixty leading artists were invited to create works whose only stipulation was having a size over 45x60 inches. The aim was to give artists an opportunity to paint large works, whose production was decreasing because of the more reduced size of homes, a decline in patronage and the post-war high cost of materials. The artworks selected were arranged in a touring exhibition which visited6iu the Laing in 1952. See: Conekin, B. (2003). *The Autobiography of a Nation: The 1951 Exhibition of Britain. Representing Britain in the Post-War World.* Manchester: Manchester University Press. p.36

[262] Anon (02-02-1952). 'Newcastle art show has its monstrosities.' *Northern Echo,* n.p.

[263] Ibid as 100, p.293.

Societies, the Society for Education through Art or the Newcastle Photographic Society. As a whole, and differently from other regional galleries, the rhythm and frequency of temporary exhibitions did not suffer significant changes compared to wartime. In addition to the Northern Counties exhibitions and the Federation of Northern Art Societies exhibition, the most relevant 'Laing-made' events were the gallery's contribution to the Festival of Britain and the four Coronation Exhibitions held in 1954, which played a key role on bringing back interest towards Thomas Bewick on the bicentenary of his birth and which contributed to the strengthening of a regional cultural identity. The same regional pride guided the organization of several exhibitions related to North-Eastern industrial design and the offering of gallery space to cultural associations such as the Newcastle Photographic Society, which organized three successful International Photographic Exhibitions in 1953, 1954 and 1956. Nevertheless, CBS rejected the Society's application to make these exhibitions an annual event, despite the press' opinion that they 'would bring valuable publicity to the city, publicity, the life-blood of the commerce.'[264] The decision seems at odds with the Laing's defence of modern art, as by the time photography was achieving a wider recognition, with the success of illustrated magazines such as *Picture Post* or the *Sunday Times Magazine*, the birth of the Magnum agency in 1947, and the rise of documentary photographers mixing information and art. Perhaps, CBS was only trying to shelter the Laing from criticisms against an excessive presence of photography in the gallery, something which did not seem to upset Collingwood Stevenson, as the event was restarted after CBS' death.

Although the majority of exhibitions of this period had an art focus, sometimes the Laing had to had to yield to the pressures of the Council, interested in using the gallery to publicise their work, such as the Exhibition showing the work of each Department of the Corporation (1952) and the Commemorative Exhibition of the Jubilee of the Lord Mayoralty (1956). Other exhibitions with political overtones were those related to countries with which there was an interest in strengthening diplomatic ties (such as the exhibitions dedicated to Scandinavian Design and Danish Book Illustration), or to territories for which there was an intention to attract

[264] Anon (04-03-1957). 'Photo fame.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

labour (as is the case of the exhibition dedicated to Australia in 1946 or the *Meet South-Africa* exhibition of 1948).[265] This last type of exhibition, organized by the Central Office of Information, recalled the ones held during the Second World War, and are the only ones which the Laing tried to resist. Especially relevant as an example is the Colonial Exhibition, held in 1951 by request of the Lord Mayor, in spite of the committee's complaints about the gallery being

> a most unsuitable place for holding this type of exhibition, which was far removed from art education and the purpose for which the gallery was built, and that in granting the use of it for the Colonial Exhibition, the Committee did so under protest, and they hoped this would be borne in mind in the future when similar exhibitions were offered to the city.[266]

The demonstrations against colonial exploitation outside the Laing were counteracted by profuse advertising, and the exhibition attracted 65,000 visitors, placing Newcastle as the second record of attendance in the country after Liverpool (fig.10). The gallery was so busy that some of the exhibits were stolen, the walls were left dirty, the paintwork on the lower part of the panels were chipped, and damage was caused to the electric switches and fuses. The minutes collect the disappointment of the committee: 'The experience of the past few weeks had confirmed the Chairman and the Committee members in the opinion that the gallery was not a suitable place for the staging of such exhibitions'.[267] These reports show a clear difference between the previous and current period and the Laing's desire to maintain its autonomy from political interference.[268]

The post-war evolution of Newcastle and its impact on the Laing

In 1945, Newcastle Council approved the *Plan for Newcastle*, a redevelopment of the city centre featuring an 'extreme modernist scenario in which hardly an existing building seems to be retained.'[269] The members of the Laing Committee saw

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[265] Ibid as 224.
[266] LCM 28-07-1950. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.138.
[267] LCM 09-02-1951. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.151.
[268] For a wider discussion on colonialism in Western museums, see: Karp, I. and Lavine, D., eds. (1991) *Exhibiting Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display.* Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.
[269] Faulkner, T. 'Architecture in Newcastle'. In Colls, R. and Lancaster, B., eds. (2001) Newcastle upon Tyne. A Modern History. Chichester: Philmore &Co, p.238.

Fig.10. Demonstrators standing in front of the Laing during the Colonial Exhibition opening ceremony. *Northern Echo*, 05-02-1951.

themselves as witnesses of a historical change connected with a Newcastle that was about to disappear or, at least, to undergo irreparable alterations. The need to document the changes was a common subject in the Laing's discussions during the late 1940s and 1950s. Following this trend, the committee member Collingwood-Stewart commissioned Byron Dawson, T.W. Pattison and Beryl Davies to produce a series of fifty-seven watercolours representing contemporary features of Newcastle that were to disappear because of the planning scheme. The artworks were then donated to the Laing, aiming to 'set an example to other towns' and to benefit 'not only to the citizens of today but for those of the future generations.'[270] Those records of the Newcastle of the 50s were described as 'not the usual views generally shown on postcards' and believed to have the potential to achieve, 'in years to come […] the same historical importance as the works of T.M. Richardson and other local artists who recorded the Newcastle of their day.'[271]

At a time in which all eyes were turned towards the construction of the 'New Newcastle', CBS feared the damage that may be done to heritage. His writings ascertained that 'the importance and interest of a town depends no less upon its ancient buildings than upon its modern', and urged the Laing Committee to take steps 'to preserve for future generations the more important legacies of the past'.[272] Apparently, he used his influence as President of the FMNC to spread his concern to curators of other northern galleries, who hoped 'that this matter should receive the serious attention of the Newcastle Council' and wished CBS 'to convey to the Laing Committee a recommendation that strong action be taken at the earliest possible moment to preserve, restore and make available to the public all buildings of local historical importance at present in danger of destruction through neglect.'[273]

The attempts to raise awareness about the imminent disappearance of Old Newcastle also conditioned several of the post-war exhibitions. For instance, in connection with the Meeting of the British Association in Newcastle in 1949, Gallery D was arranged with local historical pictures from the permanent collection, and in 1951, the Festival of Britain exhibition included 'drawings of the architectural features

[270] LCM 22-05-1947. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.67
[271] Anon (13-05-1948). City Records. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[272] Stevenson, CB (1946) 'Report about old building of local historical importance.' TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.49
[273] Ibid.

of the city, recording many buildings which have disappeared'.[274] Whilst these records of the past were collected, the Town Planning Committee started developing a proposal for the development of Princess Street which directly affected the Central Library adjoining the Laing. The demolition of the old library and the proposals for the new building threatened both the land for the Joicey Museum and the Laing building (see pp.59-69).[275]

Nevertheless, the city's reconstruction plans could not hide an industrial and economic decline whose impact in the cultural field is reflected in the failed proposals for the creation of a municipal theatre and an orchestra. Newspaper articles blamed the city for 'not fulfilling its task of cultural leadership' and complained that 'the North-East rarely makes any effort to present itself as a distinct community.'[276] Such a context hindered the fulfilment of the Laing's development plans. Although the gallery was acknowledged to make 'a genuine effort to acquire a representative collection of famous local artists' and the local collectors blamed for not making 'more generous gifts and bequests' to improve the collection, citizens did not seem to acknowledge their own responsibility in the successes and failures of the art gallery, and their criticisms showed a lack of awareness of Newcastle's loss of status within the national context and of the country's financial situation.[277] Good examples of this ignorance are the complaints because the 1948 Van Gogh touring exhibition - which visited Glasgow and Birmingham - had not made it to Newcastle, the regret because the lunch-hour concerts had stopped, or the frustration because the size and scope of the exhibitions at the Laing were diminishing.[278]

CBS' reply to the accusation that the Laing was not 'the centre of inspiration and encouragement it should be' is enlightening of the problems that the gallery was experiencing.[279] The curator explained that the Laing had 'made strenuous efforts to get the Van Gogh Exhibition long before it reached Britain', but that 'as there are complicated financial arrangements which demand that as large an income as possible shall be made by admission charges, it was agreed that it must be sent to

[274] Stevenson, CB. (1951) 'Festival of Britain Exhibition Report.' TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.160.
[275] LCM 26-11-1954. TWA, MD/NC/129/7, p.10.
[276] Orgill, D. (05-12-1951). 'City should be the Athens of the North.' *Newcastle Journal and North Mail,* n.p.
[277] Ibid.
[278] 'Vincent' (27-01-1948). 'Art Opportunity.' *Newcastle Journal and North Mail,* n.p.
[279] Ingamells, K.R. (30-01-1948). 'Northern Art'. *Newcastle Journal and North Mail,* n.p.

the biggest possible centres of population'.[280] The Laing finally managed to host a second Van Gogh traveling exhibition in 1956, but the connection of this first rejection with the certainty of not being important enough, or of not being able to attract enough public for an exhibition to be profitable, must have been shocking for the gallery, which in the Committee's minutes had always seen itself as being on a par with the galleries of larger cities, such as Liverpool or Birmingham. CBS also explained that the lunch-hour concerts had been 'running at a considerable loss', thus reminding the public of their responsibility for the viability of the activities, and the need for greater involvement: 'had the response of the public been more vigorous and enthusiastic, it might have been possible to continue the concerts in some other building.'[281] Regarding the exhibitions, CBS alluded to the space shortage in the gallery by explaining that after the return of the permanent collections 'it is only by removing valuable works of art that we are able to show exhibitions at all.' However, he mentioned that 'we have held seventeen exhibitions since the end of the war and have shown twenty-eight special monthly exhibits.'[282]

Actually, criticisms like the above may have forced the Laing to keep the 'exhibition engine' going, despite the logistical difficulties entailed. The increased importance of the Hatton gallery from the 1940s worsened the problem, and comparative comments like the following started to become more common: 'With the building of the Hatton's reputation, one notices gradual falling-off in the enterprise of what used to be the chief art centre of Newcastle, the Laing Art Gallery'.[283] It must have been ironic for CBS to see how part of the money from the Shipley bequest, which the Laing had failed to obtain in the 1910s, was then being used to buy the Renaissance paintings and Old Flemish Masters that the Laing could not afford and with whose fame it could not compete.[284] The once successful policy of focusing on English painting also began to be questioned:

> The Laing Gallery must be the chief gateway to the world of art for more than 1,000,000 people living in or around Newcastle. To pretend that they can achieve cultural maturity on an artistic diet limited to British pictures is as foolish as to expect them to appreciate all the pleasures of eating on a

[280] Stevenson, C.B. (28-01-1948). City too small for art show. *Newcastle Journal and North Mail,* n.p.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Anon (10-05-1955). 'Newcastle Art Galleries.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[284] Ibid as 18.

> physical diet consisting only on roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. We must no longer be satisfied to make good this dietary deficiency by occasional injections from loan exhibitions. Civic pride alone should make Newcastle unwilling to accept continued inferiority to York and Leeds, but pride must be paid for. Culture is amongst the cheapest and most rewarding investments for any community: parsimony brings its own condemnation.[285]

Despite political responsibility for the Laing's underfunding being mentioned, not all the public was able to see the real causes of the problem. A progressive change in people's consideration towards the Laing may have led to the establishment of a different kind of relationship between the gallery and its visitors in the 1960s, although a discussion on the matter is beyond the borders of this study.

Conclusion

This chapter has framed the creation of the Laing in the context of Edwardian museums. It has also evidenced different stages in the evolution of the gallery during its first fifty years: Firstly, during the First World War, the Laing settled itself as an essential component of the cultural life of Newcastle, laying the foundations for its future development. The ability to adapt to circumstances allowed the growth of the collections despite the drastic budget reduction, coinciding with times when other museums were forced to close. And although the decisions taken to silence the criticisms and prove the usefulness to the war effort sometimes meant the sacrifice of artistic ideals, or changes in the quality of the exhibitions, the gallery successfully survived a time that otherwise could have had disastrous consequences.

Secondly, the interwar years brought a long period of stability which allowed a major growth of the collection, achieved through bequests (John G. Joicey, Wigham Richardson, George E. Henderson) and purchases of modern art. The engagement in the national art network - obtained through the visits to London and the participation in the MA meetings - and the presence of more expert committee members led to the arrangement of inspiring exhibitions and to an emphasis on education. During this period, the Laing became a factory of cultural initiatives and a patron of local artists through the commission of the lunette decorations and the

[285] Geffen, I. (07-08-1956). 'City gallery should provide less limited art diet.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

organisation of exhibitions. As a negative counterpoint, financial problems continued to have a negative impact upon the gallery's potential.

Thirdly, during the Second World War, the Laing's evidenced resilience and capacity to keep Newcastle's cultural life active through an impressive array of exhibitions and events. CBS' curatorial work showed professional experience and a calm partly based on the fact that most of the permanent collection had already been achieved. Newspaper articles praised how 'the museum has not for one moment ceased to provide for the cultural life of Newcastle during the war.'[286] The enthusiastic support given by the public, whose attendance at the museum reached up to 5,000 visitors on some days, evidences the success of the formula.

Last, the post-war period provided a bittersweet closure to CBS' career in the context of the crisis of Newcastle's industries. As newspapers commented in 1956, 'Mr. C. Bernard Stevenson's sustained achievement over more than fifty years is surely long overdue for some official recognition'.[287] The failed Jubilee Exhibition of 1954, which should have been intended to celebrate the life-long career of the Laing's first curator, would have made a much more fitting bookend to the early history of the gallery than the irregular outcome of the 1950s. But, despite the adverse circumstances, the period can still be considered full of successes for the Laing, with the popularity of the Van Gogh exhibition, the Bewick bicentenary, and the first full-scale John Martin display of the Festival of Britain accompanied by several purchases of the artist's masterpieces. And although much work was left to be done regarding the issue of the Joicey Museum, the recovery of the visitors' trust and the enlargement of the collections to include European painting, CBS' achievements had a symbolic weight that went beyond the Laing itself.

[286] Anon (18-04-1945). '£250,000 City Art Treasures in hills.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[287] Anon (03-08-1956). 'Round North-East art galleries.' *Northern Echo,* n.p.

CHAPTER 3. THE PEOPLE

> The imaginative and wise direction of the gallery is in hands of Mr. Bernard Stevenson, who is more than a curator of an art gallery. In a sense, he is the custodian of the artistic conscience of Tyneside.[1]

This chapter analyses the role of the people in charge of the Laing, as the decision-makers whose efforts made its collection possible. It discloses the impact that their training and knowledge, their skills and their personal connections had on the early years of the gallery. The Laing, like many late Victorian and Edwardian regional museums, followed a double-headed management scheme: a curator was in charge of technical matters, whilst Boards of Trustees or Committees decided upon finances and representation. Following this scheme, the chapter has been divided into two sections. **Section A** deals with CBS' training, skills and career, the circumstances that led him to become the curator of the Laing and his vision for art galleries, as a case study of the philosophy guiding curators of the early twentieth century. **Section B** analyses the Laing's organizational aspects, focusing especially on the first steps taken to create working routines. It discusses the structure of the Committee and the connexion of their members with Newcastle's political and cultural elites, whilst explaining how the daily running of the gallery and the decision-making processes were conditioned by the ever-present issues of underfunding and understaffing. Comparison with other regional galleries is highlighted, in the awareness that, in its early years, when the museum profession in Britain was still in its beginnings, curators relied heavily on networking and the advice of fellow professionals, either directly with individuals or collectively via the MA.

[1] Anon (01-08-1956). 'Laing Art Gallery shows best of its treasures'. *Northern Echo,* n.p.

A. AN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY CURATOR

C. Bernard Stevenson (Nottingham, 1874 - Newcastle, 1957) followed an unusual career path. Coming from a working-class family without any tradition of collecting and lacking artistic training or theoretical knowledge about art history, it seemed unlikely that he could one day become the creator of one of the most complete art collections in the provinces. Although a mixture of circumstances and his own personality had a determining weight in this success, it is necessary to understand to what extent his career differed from that of his colleagues, and from that of the next generation of curators, of which his own son will be studied as the closest example. The analysis of his working conditions at the Laing completes the portrait of a professional as unique as the gallery he managed for over fifty years.

Early career. The Nottingham Castle and Museum

CBS started working at the Castle Museum, Nottingham, around 1888, supposedly while receiving private tuition and, later, evening lessons at the Nottingham University College (fig.1).[2] There, he was apparently enrolled at the Nottingham School of Art, where he started a lifelong acquaintanceship with fellow students Harold and Laura Knight, although it is not clear whether he completed a degree.[3] Regarding the Castle Museum, the first recorded mention of the 'Junior Clerk Stevenson' - in connection to an application for an increase in his wage - dates from 1890.[4]

The Castle Museum, which opened in 1878, had been directed since its beginnings by G. Harry Wallis (1847–1936). Like many Victorian curators, George Harry was part of a well-known dynasty of art connoisseurs and collectors. His father was George Wallis (1811-1891), artist, professor and

[2] Jamieson, J. (1905). 'Northumberland at the opening of the twentieth century.' *W.T. Pike's New Century Series*, no.14, p.200.
[3] Anon (26-11-1932). 'A box of paints'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[4] Nottingham Castle Museum Committee Minutes (07-05-1890). Nottinghamshire Records office.

Fig.1.14-year-old CBS (bottom row, first on the left side) sitting near curator G.H. Wallis and the rest of the Nottingham Castle Museum staff. MSA.

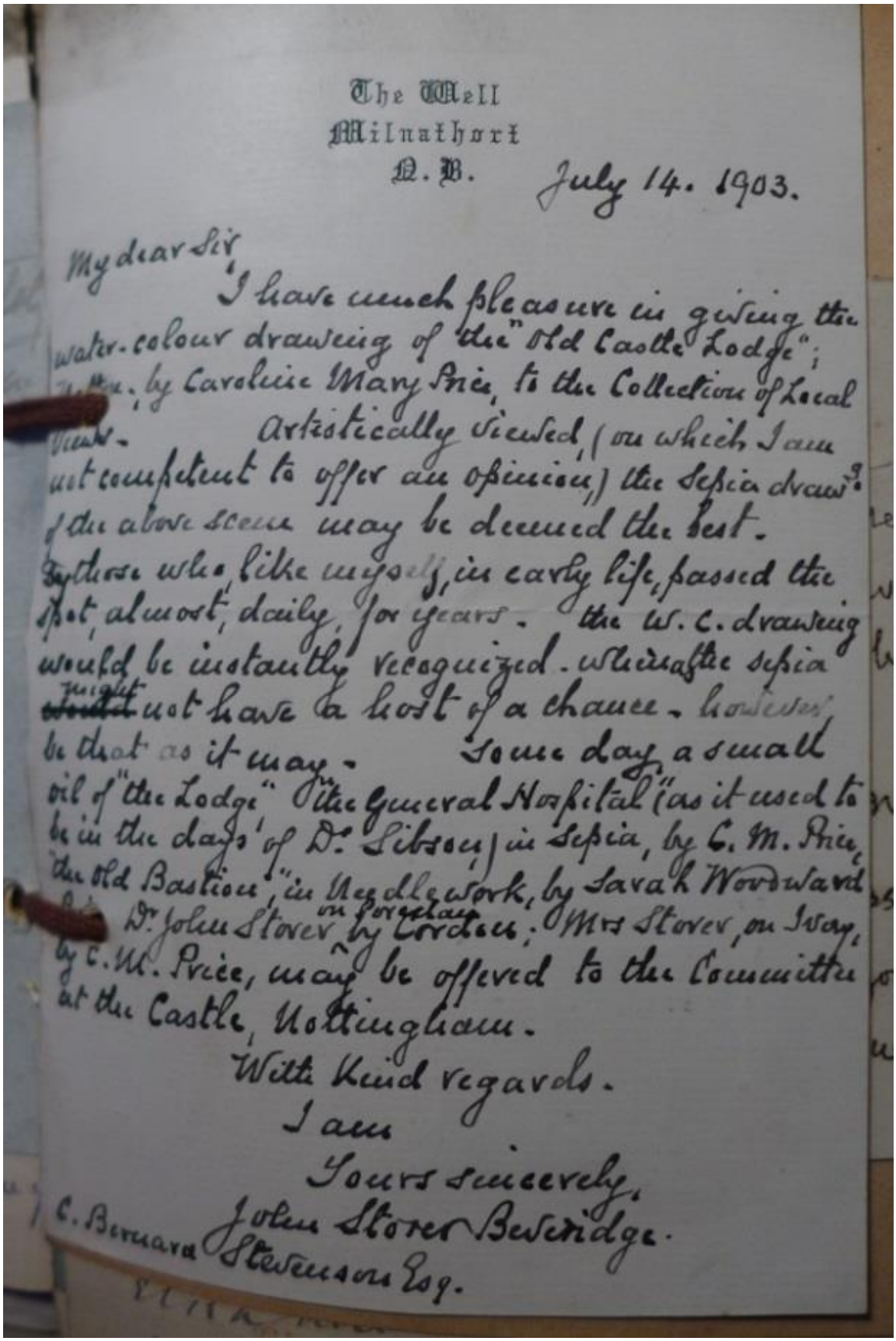
Senior Keeper at the South Kensington Museum since 1858, where Harry and his brother Sir Whitworth Wallis (1855-1927), first Director of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, had received their early training. Harry Wallis' sister, Rosa (1857-1939), had studied at Manchester Royal College of Art and in Berlin, before becoming a well-established artist. George Harry's son, George P. Dudley Wallis (1883-n.d.), continued the family tradition by becoming, in 1922, the curator of the Manchester Whitworth Institute, which had been founded by his grandfather's old friend, Sir Joseph Whitworth (1803-1887).[5]

However, either because G.H. Wallis was not as talented as the other members of his family, his workload was excessive, or because CBS managed to make himself indispensable, the fact is that, since at least 1894, the young assistant appears to have been answering some of the letters addressed to Wallis (fig.2). By helping his boss with everyday issues, CBS managed to gain technical knowledge and status within the museum's hierarchy. He also started creating the network which later became essential to him at the Laing. Circumstances favoured him when, in 1898, the former principal clerk in Wallis' office left the position. CBS was immediately promoted, and his salary increased to 35s a week.[6] However, while annual increases continued in the following years, his professional category remained that of 'Chief Clerk', and no mentions of curatorial duties are recorded in the Castle Museum minutes. This lack of recognition of his work - which in the last years equivaled to an Assistant Curator - together with the better conditions offered by Newcastle (the initial salary received at the Laing, although low for the standards of the time, doubled the one he was receiving in Nottingham) probably motivated CBS's move.

CBS' correspondence work for Nottingham Castle Museum also gave him the opportunity to know about the Newcastle job. In her memoirs, CBS' wife Laverna explains:

> About this time [1903] there used to be rather surprising letters come to the Castle from a man in Newcastle upon Tyne called Dickenson (sic), who wrote from the Pen and Palette Club. He used to write for

[5] Baird, O. (2008). 'The Knights of Museums: the Wallis Family and their Memorabilia in the Collection of the Wolverhampton Art Gallery'. *The Birmingham Historian*, Issue 32, Summer 2008, pp. 23-29.
[6] Nottingham Castle Museum Committee Minutes (07-12-1898). Nottinghamshire Records office.



The Well
Milnathort
N.B. July 14. 1903.

My dear Sir,

I have much pleasure in giving the water-colour drawing of the "Old Castle Lodge"; [illegible] by Caroline Mary Price, to the Collection of Local Views. Artistically viewed, (on which I am not competent to offer an opinion,) the Sepia drawing of the above scene may be deemed the best. To those who, like myself, in early life, passed the spot, almost, daily, for years, the W. C. drawing would be instantly recognized. Whereas the sepia might not have a host of a chance. However, be that as it may. Some day a small oil of "the Lodge" "the General Hospital" (as it used to be in the days of Dr. Gibson,) in Sepia, by C. M. Price, "the Old Bastion", in Needlework, by Sarah Woodward [illegible] Dr. John Storer on Porcelain by Cordon; Mrs Storer, on Ivory, by C. M. Price, may be offered to the Committee at the Castle, Nottingham.

With Kind regards.

I am

Yours sincerely,

John Storer Beveridge.

C. Bernard Stevenson Esq.

Fig.2. One example of CBS' curatorial tasks at the Nottingham Castle Museum. Letter from local collector John Storer Beveridge related with a donation achieved by CBS for the Castle Museum collections (14-07-1903). MSA.

> all sorts of information as to how to run an Art Gallery - how you set about getting together collections of pictures for exhibitions etc. etc. The chief, Mr George Harry Wallis, to whom these letters were addressed, used to hand them over to C.B.S. and tell him to tell 'this 'man' what he wanted. At last, they used to come so frequently, the chief got a bit sick of them. They discovered that there was being built in Newcastle an Art Gallery which was going to be handed over to the City as a gift from a Mr Alexander Laing as a thanks offering for fifty years successful business life. Mr Wallis wrote at last and told this man Dickenson that the best thing Newcastle could do was to appoint a Curator at once - a man who knew his business. After this, they heard no more from Mr Dickenson.[7]

The memoirs provide evidence of how local art organisations relied on each other for vital information and advice. As discussed on chapter 1, the Pen and Palette Club was one of the pressure groups demanding the creation of an art gallery in Newcastle. The Club's Secretary, Thomas Dickinson, would become CBS' main competitor in the application process for the Laing's curatorial position. Luckily, most details regarding this application and the Laing's selection procedure have been kept, offering valuable first-hand information of the methods that regional galleries of the period may have followed for the appointment of the earliest British curators.

Although the Laing Committee had been on duty since August 1903, its initial working pace was slow, with the building still under construction. The deterioration of Alexander Laing's health accelerated both the construction work and other steps necessary for the opening, one of which was the appointment of a curator, whose salary was fixed at £300.[8] On the 7th of May 1904, the advertisement with a deadline on the 18th was issued.[9] Laverna described CBS' long-standing interest on the job and the circumstances of his last-minute application:

> One evening [16th of May 1904] C.B.S. came in - threw down a paper - the Athenaeum I think and said 'There, with being up here, I've missed seeing the advertisement I've been looking out for a long time.' 'Oh, what's that?' said I. 'They are advertising for a Curator for that Art Gallery they have been building in Newcastle and the

[7] Stevenson, L. (n.d.). *Memoirs.* According to text transcribed and digitized by Michael Stevenson, p.70. MSA.
[8] LCM 05-02-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.9
[9] LCM 07-05-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.13

> applications are to be in by noon the day after tomorrow and I've no time to do anything about it.' 'Why not?' said I. 'Oh, there is no time to get the application and testimonials ready in time.' 'Oh yes, there is if you set to work at once, you might as well have a shot at it.' So that evening he set to work drafting out his application. […] Mr Wallis remembered he knew a man in Newcastle named Sir John Milburn, who turned out to be on the Committee of the Laing Art Gallery, so he wrote to him and told him his Chief Assistant was putting in for the Newcastle job. Sir John wrote back saying he would certainly support C.B.S., but that he feared he would have no chance as a man named Dickenson, a local man, had buttonholed most of the Committee and he was afraid it was a cut and dried affair.[10]

Statements as the above evidence the influence of local art personalities in the arrangements for the opening of the Laing and help to understand the adverse reactions taking place after CBS' appointment. This situation was not very different from public galleries in other provincial cities, the creation of most of them being intertwined with previously existing learned societies and artists' societies.[11]

The selection process

The Laing Committee received forty-nine applications, from which six were shortlisted for an interview. Their details were recorded in the Laing minutes (fig.3).[12] The first applicant, William Salt Brassington (1859-1939) was a businessman, historian and archaeologist. He had been a museum officer and librarian at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre since 1895 (a position he kept until 1914) and was the author of *Historic Worcestershire* (1894), *Picturesque Warwickshire* (1902) and *Shakespeare's Homeland* (1903).[13] Although he may look the strongest applicant from our modern perspective, he was immediately rejected by the Committee for undisclosed reasons. Not much is known about Archibald Sparke, who was the author of *The Liber Studiorum of J. M. W.*

[10] Ibid.
[11] For an analysis of the issue, see: Waterfield, G. (2015*). The People's Galleries. Art, Museums and exhibitions in Britain, 1800-1914.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, pp.45-57.
[12] LCM 19-05-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.15
[13] 'William Salt Brassington'. *Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Archives*. Retrieved from http://collections.shakespeare.org.uk/search/archive/arch-157499

NAME	AGE	QUALIFICATIONS
W.S. Brassington	45	Curator at Shakespeare's Memorial, Strafford upon Avon, including the management of the picture gallery.
H.G. Clayton	33	Assistant at Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, for 10 years.
Thomas Dickinson	49	Artist. Has had experience in organizing Exhibitions of Art in Newcastle over a period of 20 years. Connected to the Academy of Arts in Blackett Street.
C.B. Stevenson	32	On the staff of Nottingham Corporation Art Museum for 16 years and during the latter part of this time has acted as Assistant Curator.
A. Sparke	35	For 10 years was Assistant at Cardiff Art Galleries and Museum. In 1894 was appointed curator at Kidderminster Art Gallery. In 1898 appointed Director of the Carlisle Art Gallery, and in 1901, appointed Curator at the Corporation Art Gallery at Bury, Lancashire.
James Watson	52	Corporation Art Gallery. Has organized exhibitions. Art master of Royal Grammar School.

Fig.3.Candidates shortlisted for the curatorial position at the Laing.

Turner, R.A. (1902) and who apparently continued as Curator at Bury, nor about Watson (a member of the Bewick Club) or Clayton, all of whom were also rejected. Only Dickinson and CBS remained, with seven votes each: the draw was only solved through the casting vote of Alexander Laing, acting as a Chairman.

One may question the reasons why Mr Laing chose the lesser known candidate. The fact that Dickinson was Farquhar Laing's protégé may suggest a rivalry between both brothers (see pp.18-29). Perhaps Mr Laing rated the young outsider as a self-made man like himself: someone without external support or influences from local elites. Or CBS may have seemed the most qualified, or the most optimistic in his proposal to endow the gallery with a collection in a timely manner, an issue that worried the elderly businessman. Indeed, the fact that CBS was told about his appointment on the spot and asked to start as early as possible confirms the urgency Mr Laing's illness gave to proceedings.

The reactions

The *Daily Journal* reported news of the appointment, highlighting that Dickinson had been close, but that CBS' 'ripe experience' and his 'commendable part in the collection of exhibits for the Nottingham Gallery' had been decisive.[14] 'Nottingham's reputation as an arts centre, with its annual exhibition, and an art gallery which is an example that Newcastle should follow', because of it being 'devoted to Art culture and not monetary advantage' was praised.[15] The newspapers also noted how 'the contractors of the building have promised to deliver it before the end of the month', another allusion to the haste to open the gallery. Both the newspapers and the Committee added a couple of years to CBS' actual age in 1904, something he probably did himself to increase his authority. The curator's tendency to exaggerate details in his favour was a recurrent personality feature: a related example can be found in his writings

[14] Anon (04-06-1904). 'Laing Art Gallery. Appointment of curator'. *Newcastle Daily Journal,* p.5e.
[15] Ibid.

about the selection process for the position, where he asserted that 'I was selected between sixty-five applicants.'[16]

On the following days, several letters to the editor complained about CBS not being a local. The first one, signed by a J. Johnston, expressed 'the sense of deep disappointment that is universally felt' because of the 'great injustice to local candidates, who for many years have kept alive the spirit of art in our midst, at great personal sacrifice'.[17] The letter alluded to the reports of the Art Union and the exhibitions held in the Old Assembly Rooms, the Bewick Club, the Central Exchange Art Gallery, and the Academy of Arts. It denounced the new curator for, besides having only been an assistant, not possessing a knowledge of local art, which was considered essential for a local gallery. It begged Newcastle Council to imitate the Liverpool Council, which had instructed the Walker Art Gallery Committee to change their decision and to appoint the local candidate E.R. Dibdin instead of Mr Martin, of the Royal Society of British Artists, in 1902. Little is known about this J. Johnston signing the letter, other than he had been present at the public meeting of supporters of an art gallery convened by Mayor Harkus in 1899, thus pointing towards a connection with the Pen and Palette Club (see p.78).[18] Also, the fact that the letter came from Low Fell - the same neighbourhood where Dickinson lived – suggests an acquaintance between both men. A reply published on the following day seemed to point in this same direction when asserting that, in addition to the Laing not being 'made for the purpose of getting up an exhibition of purely local pictures, but as a gallery for high-class works of art, whether local or not local', nor was it created 'for the purpose of providing a situation for any person in particular'.[19] The writer valued the Laing Committee's impartiality and professionality, as 'the most select and most comprehensive of its kind ever appointed in the city' and said ironically that, although life is full of disappointments, 'it is very unfair to use such disappointment as ground for casting reproach upon a choice most carefully and impartially made by a body

[16] Stevenson, C.B. (01-1939) Draft on talk about the Laing during the Second World War, p.1. MSA.
[17] Johnston, J. (24-06-1904). 'Curatorship of the Laing Art Gallery.' *Newcastle Daily Journal,* p.8e.
[18] Anon (13-10-1899). 'Projected art gallery in Newcastle'. *Evening Chronicle,* p.4a.
[19] 'Whist' (25-06-1904). 'The Laing Art Gallery Curatorship'. *Newcastle Daily Journal,* p.4c.

of gentlemen whose circumstances place them beyond the influence of the importunate canvasser.'[20]

A further letter supported the Laing Committee and begged the Council not to 'play the foolish game played at Liverpool.'[21] It agreed on the Committee's abilities, whilst pointing out that 'the local applicant' was not responsible for Mr Laing's gift, but rather Sir William Stephenson (see p.25).[22] The letter affirmed that 'the importation of outsiders' was not 'a thing to cry about', as Newcastle could 'benefit of the experience of other communities', and argued that the fact that no artist had regretted the decision of the Laing Committee demonstrated the confidence of the community in the benefits deriving from an independent management, since someone unrelated to local associations or owners of collections would be much more impartial when selecting the artworks for the Laing. It ended by highlighting CBS' qualification, having been trained 'under an excellent chief'.[23]

J. Johnston could not resist answering these articles, and whilst he admitted the similar merits of the two finalists (and hence the draw that only Mr Laing's vote could resolve), he persisted in arguing that the Laing should represent local art.[24] One final reply to Johnston's queries recalled that the committee had chosen the best-prepared candidate, who had been legitimately appointed, and that it was 'a most unworthy enterprise to go about to get him dismissed from his new office before he has made a start'.[25]

The rejection of his candidacy was a major setback for Dickinson's career.[26] But according to Laverna Stevenson, the person most affected by CBS' appointment was his former boss at the Castle Museum, G.H. Wallis, who

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[20] Ibid.
[21] 'Art'. (27-06-1904). 'Curatorship of the Laing Art Gallery.' *Newcastle Daily Journal*, p.4e.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Johnston, J. (01-07-1904). 'Curatorship of the Laing Art Gallery.' *Newcastle Daily Journal,* p.6f.
[25] Anon. (02-07-1904). 'Curatorship of the Laing Art Gallery.' *Newcastle Daily Journal,* p.4e.
[26] In a letter sent to the Laing Committee member Lord Ridley in 1908, Dickinson insisted on his dedication to the cause of art for Newcastle for over twenty years and asked the Laing Committee to give him a job suitable to his knowledge, because since the opening of the gallery he had been largely unemployed despite his efforts. He also mentioned that he had been employed for a while in the Public Library (a job he probably managed to achieve thanks to his friendship with Heslop and Hodgkin, since both were members of the Library Committee). The letter concluded by accusing the Laing of the decline in his job opportunities, and mentioning the desperation of his situation, without

> had been quite happy to give C.B.S. a glowing testimonial, relying on the word of his friend Sir John Milburn, that it was a cut and dried affair, but when it transpired that C.B.S. had been appointed he was shattered. C.B.S. had been his personal assistant for seventeen years and he had got in the way of relying on him for everything. If anything was wanted in either Gallery or residence, it was always C.B.S. who was put in charge.[27]

Indeed, the account of CBS' tasks in Nottingham evidences how he acted more as Wallis' personal assistant than as an Assistant Curator, which was perhaps another reason motivating him to look elsewhere for work opportunities.

The salary

CBS' salary was discussed and reviewed on numerous occasions during his 53-year career at the Laing, in some cases at his own request, but mostly at the initiative of the Committee, which sometimes had to defend the curator's work before the Council, as some councillors disapproved public expenditure connected to the art gallery. In Council minutes, CBS is described as

> a man in a thousand. The success of the Laing Art Gallery was very largely due to his initiative and work. It was through his efforts that the late Mr Joicey bequeathed £50,000 towards the Gallery, and, also, many of the treasures. Mr Stevenson took a very great interest in his work and had a very deep knowledge of art. […] Mr Stevenson had been the means of getting many gifts to the Gallery, worth many thousands of pounds.[28]

Nevertheless, and as happened to most regional curators, CBS' salary increases followed irregular patterns and remained within a low range. Indeed, the Miers Report criticised the 'disgracefully low standard of salaries' in the profession, stating that, on average, provincial curators received half the minimum recommended by the MA in 1922.[29] For cities with over 300,000 inhabitants (like Newcastle in the 1920s), the MA recommended a minimum

savings and with a wife and five children dependent upon his earnings. See: Dickinson, T. (14-07-1908). Letter to Lord Ridley. MSA.

[27] Op. cit. note 7, p.74.

[28] NCR 05-03-1930, L352-N536 (T), p.214.

[29] Miers, H.A. (1928). *A Report on the Public Museums of the British Isles (other than the National Museums) to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees.* Edinburgh: T&A Constable, p.20.

salary of £900, whilst on that period CBS was getting £650 (a general practitioner earned an average of £750). Contrastingly, in the same years, Sir Whitworth Wallis – one of the 'knights' of the curatorial profession - was earning £900 at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.[30]

The constant allusions to the curator's salary in the Laing Committee minutes demonstrate that the subject had been controversial since the beginning. For instance, when CBS asked for his first salary increase, after five years in the post, he was requested to obtain information about the salaries of curators in similar galleries, and the proportion regarding the total salaries paid by those galleries, maybe in the hope that they would be lower than the ones paid by the Laing. However, the results proved CBS right (fig.4).[31]

Therefore, the Committee agreed to ask the Council to increase CBS' salary up to £450, on the grounds that curators of similar galleries got not only higher salaries but also 'house and firing.'[32] After being reminded of CBS' double work - because of the need to organise loan exhibitions to generate income to service the original debt which was still owed by the gallery, and the lack of any public funding during its first two years -, the Council agreed on the augmentation of the salary, but achieved this by reducing, in exchange, the gallery's annual estimates by £50.[33] Further increases took place in 1913 (to £550 p.a.), 1922 (to £650 p.a.), 1925 and 1940. The last rise - from £850 p.a. plus war bonus of £59.16.0 p.a., to £1,000 p.a. inclusive — took effect in 1953, shortly after the curator's seventy-ninth birthday. He may have felt that, if asking for further increases, he would be told to retire, so he kept this salary until his death. When the same amount was offered to Collingwood Stevenson on his appointment, he had to remind the Laing Committee that this salary had long become outdated.[34]

[30] Kavanagh, G. (1994). Museums and the first World War. A Social History. London and New York: Leicester University Press, p.95.
[31] LCM 29-01-1909. TWA, MD.NC/129/2, p.66.
[32] LCM 26-02-1909. TWA, MD.NC/129/2, p.69.
[33] NCR 30-9-1909. L352-N536 (T), p.440.
[34] LCM 31-05-1957. TWA MD.NC/129/7, p.92.

GALLERY NAME	CURATOR'S SALARY	TOTAL SALARIES PAID	COMMENTS
Laing, Newcastle	£400	£938	
Birmingham	£600	£2,106	Large permanent Collections, temporary exhibitions held very rarely.
Edinburgh	£550	£1,835	Occasional exhibitions
Glasgow	£500 plus housing	£1,790	
Castle Museum, Nottingham	£500 plus housing	£1,717	Large permanent collections, temporary exhibitions held occasionally
Barnard Castle	£500 plus housing	£1,377	No exhibitions
Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool	£450	£1,593	One exhibition yearly
Manchester City Art Gallery and Whitworth Institute	£650	£2,475	Permanent collection and one annual exhibition.
Sheffield	£400	£1,850	Permanent collection. No exhibitions.
Brighton	£400	£1,006	Small gallery. Only one autumn exhibition
Salford	£400 plus housing	£805	Small gallery. Permanent collection. No exhibitions.

Fig. 4. Data regarding curators' salaries, as obtained by CBS in 1909. TWA.

The duties

The job requirements defined after CBS' appointment consisted of applying for loans, arranging exhibitions, preparing catalogues and informing the press of initiatives.[35] But CBS' actual tasks went much further, involving, indeed, 'the work of two lifetimes'.[36] Similarly to modern curators in small galleries, his varied job included not only the management of artworks - comprising the acquisition, care and display of items - but also the search for funding and the creation and delivery of educational elements such as lectures, school visits, concerts, film shows and even radio programmes. As the early Laing did not possess any other specialized staff, CBS was, in effect, the Laing manager, a task which involved dealing with the operations (insurance, bills, taxes, etc.), the budget and the staff. Moreover, he was in charge of building a solid relationship with local collectors, artists, dealers and gallery curators all across the country. Moreover, the curator found time for research, managing to acquire a reputation as an expert in British painting, attending conferences, giving talks, writing articles for magazines and creating the catalogues of nearly three hundred special loan exhibitions, and of the Laing permanent collections of watercolours (with biographical accounts of over three hundred artists) and oil paintings. In his free time, he practised amateur painting, and was a member of the Art Committee of the Department of Fine Art at Kings College (current Newcastle University), of the Imperial Arts League, the MA and the National Arts Collection Fund, and secretary of the Newcastle-Egypt Exploration Society.

Described as a shy but friendly man ('the quality that shines above all others is his tact, and his ability to make friends. And he is the shyest man in Newcastle'), CBS' personal and professional lives intertwined throughout his career.[37] He worked hard on his networking with artists such as Laura (1877-1970) and Harold Knight (1874-1961), T.C. Gotch (1854–1931), the illustrator Tom Browne (1870-1910) and also J.B. Manson (1879-1945), whom he continued frequenting even after the scandals leading to his resignation as the Tate Director.[38] Politicians, local businessmen and collectors were also

[35] LCM 04-07-1904. TWA MD.NC/129/1, p.77.
[36] LCM 31-05-1957. TWA MD.NC/129/7, p.90.
[37] Spencer, J.R. (1937). *The Northern Pageant*. Newcastle: Newcastle Chronicle, p.192.
[38] Spalding, F. (1998). *The Tate: A History.* London: Tate Gallery Publishing, pp. 62–70.

common in CBS' network, and their letters included requests for advice regarding art matters and personal invitations to their residences. An example of the latter would be Lord Armstrong's personal invitation for CBS to visit Cragside and Bamburgh Castle in 1906.[39]

Despite the variety of duties carried out, CBS was concerned that his fellow citizens thought that he did not work hard enough: on personal writings about his profession, he was eager to highlight that, despite the appearances, his was not an easy job: 'of course the ideal job is to be a curator of an art gallery - a cushy job - you just sit and look at pictures and beautiful things. Well, there's another side to the picture, and the other side is jolly hard work.'[40]

The MA as the advocate of the curatorial profession

The museums profession had only emerged in the nineteenth century 'as a result of the specialization of management and the growth of both national and local government', with this industry's workers only gaining enough self-awareness to organise themselves by the end of the century: their professional body, the MA, was created in 1898.[41] Networking between curators was a key to success in an era in which the profession was still under development and training was only available through practical experience (the MA's diploma, first qualification for the profession, was only established in 1932).[42] The invitations to private views, the offering of art books, the exchange of information or even borrowing lantern slides for talks were everyday subjects discussed by these first professionals, of which CBS is a well-documented example. Especially remarkable is his connexion with Edward Rimbault Vere Dibdin (1853-1941) second curator of the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (1904-1920). The letters they exchanged give account of a close friendship that sometimes led to professional favours: for instance, Dibdin was the expert chosen by the Laing to

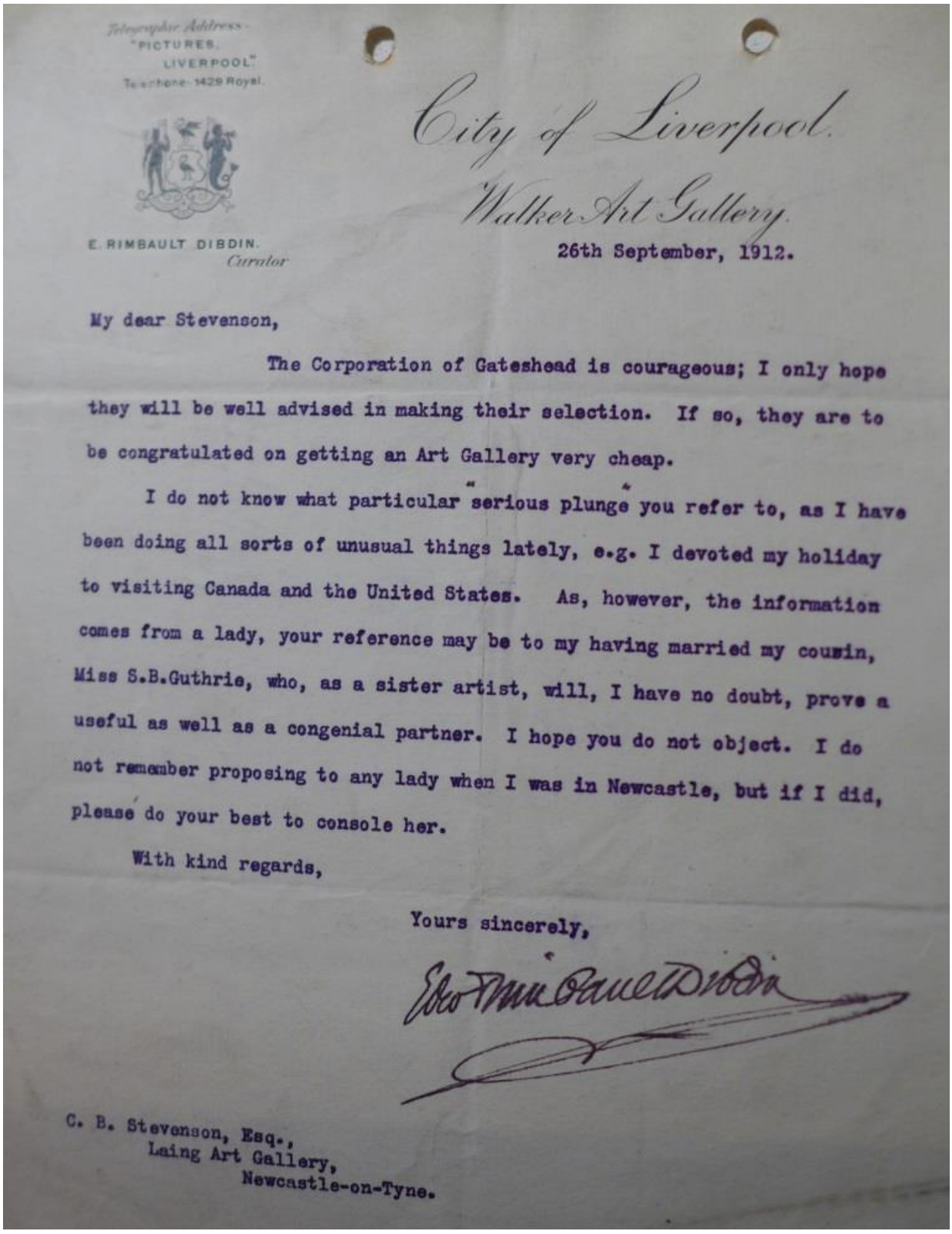
[39] Lord Armstrong (31-03-1906). Letter to C.B. Stevenson. MSA.
[40] Op. cit. note 16.
[41] Lewis, G. (1989). *For Instruction and Recreation. A centenary History of the Museums Association*. London: Quiller Press, p.17.
[42] Ibid, p.54.

corroborate CBS' opinion in the Shipley issue (fig.5), or to curate the North East Coast Exhibition in 1929.[43]

The background where many of these acquaintances started were the annual conferences of the MA. For CBS, the attendance to these meetings was also key to obtain a perspective of art matters at a national level, thus becoming one of the few ways to overcome Newcastle's peripherality. Although he had already attended some of the pre-war conferences, and had even presented a report on the Laing collection at the Sheffield MA meeting (1917), CBS' trips to the annual gatherings did not become regular until 1929. From then on, however, the curator's detailed reports to the Laing Committee show a steady interest in the discussions taking place in the conferences, from which he seemed to pursue three different aims: updating his training and improving his museum knowledge, getting reassured that the Laing was working in a modern and educational manner, and maintaining his relationship with other museum directors. On his own words, the MA conferences offered 'an exceptional opportunity for personal contact with curators of the various galleries and an active and beneficial exchange of views on art gallery and museums administration generally.'[44]

Through the annual MA events, CBS also obtained a better consciousness of the Laing's needs and of its reality as a provincial museum. For instance, from the Cardiff Conference (1930), he brought information related to the Carnegie Trust and its proposal to devote £10,000 for small museums, something which strikes as a new self-awareness of the Laing's size in comparison with bigger or more powerful regional galleries.[45] The same idea seems to pervade the report of the Norwich Conference (1933), of which CBS brought an urge to develop 'some definite scheme in the formation of art gallery collections.'[46] His report of the conference pointed to 'the value of the concentration by the Laing Committee on the formation of watercolours to illustrate the rise and progress of

[43] Anguix, L. (forthcoming) '"A collection of mere travesties of time-honoured originals." The rejection of the Shipley Bequest.' *Journal of the History of Collections.*
[44] LCM 25-07-1930. TWA, MD/NC/129/4, p.117.
[45] Ibid.
[46] LCM 28-07-1933. TWA, MD/NC/129/4, p.223.



Telegraphic Address:
"PICTURES,
LIVERPOOL"
Telephone 1429 Royal.

City of Liverpool.

Walker Art Gallery.

E. RIMBAULT DIBDIN.
Curator

26th September, 1912.

My dear Stevenson,

The Corporation of Gateshead is courageous; I only hope they will be well advised in making their selection. If so, they are to be congratulated on getting an Art Gallery very cheap.

I do not know what particular serious plunge you refer to, as I have been doing all sorts of unusual things lately, e.g. I devoted my holiday to visiting Canada and the United States. As, however, the information comes from a lady, your reference may be to my having married my cousin, Miss S.B.Guthrie, who, as a sister artist, will, I have no doubt, prove a useful as well as a congenial partner. I hope you do not object. I do not remember proposing to any lady when I was in Newcastle, but if I did, please do your best to console her.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

E. Rimbault Dibdin

C. B. Stevenson, Esq.,
Laing Art Gallery,
Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Fig.5. Letter from E. Rimbault Dibdin regarding the Shipley Bequest (28-9-1912). MSA.

the art, and in the development of the important local historical section of the museum, which gave the Laing a definite distinction.'[47] This report led to a Committee discussion on the Laing's watercolour and local section policies, which were thus reaffirmed. From this same conference, CBS encountered the suggestion of creating a Children's Section in provincial museums, something that could not finally be applied to the Laing because of the lack of space. Nevertheless, the idea became the nucleus of one of the main educational resources of the Laing's early years: the creation of small circulating collections to be sent to schools, an initiative started in the inter-war period and taking definitive shape during the Second World War.[48]

Comparison with other curators

When CBS started his career, higher training in Art History, Heritage Management, Curating, or other related disciplines had not yet developed, so curators came from related fields, having originally been art critics, artists, or specialists in other specialities, such as literature or music. Nevertheless, higher education and being well read were features common to most of them, something that CBS lacked, and that for him it was an embarrassing matter that he tried to hide through autodidactic training, and by making sure that all his children could receive higher education.[49] Besides the examples of the Wallis family already noted, further examples of CBS' difference from his colleagues are visible in the contrast with two other curators of his time, both personally and professionally connected with him, and related to Northern galleries: the aforementioned E.R. Dibdin and George Kirby.

Despite holding a degree in Law and having worked at an insurance office in Liverpool since 1877, Dibdin came from a family connected with arts and literature, some of whose members were the songwriter Charles Dibdin, the

[47] Ibid.
[48] LCM 28-07-1933. TW A, MD/NC/129/4, p.225.
[49] Another curator with an unusual career path, featuring common traits with CBS' training but belonging to an older generation, was Elijah Howarth (1853-1938). Howarth started working for the Liverpool Museum at the age of eighteen and became the curator of the Sheffield Museum when he was twenty-three, staying in charge for over fifty years. See: 'Elijah Howarth'. *Museums Sheffield.* www.collections.museums-sheffield.org.uk.

dramatist John Dibdin and the bibliographer Thomas Froguall Dibdin. He was an amateur painter and had been an art connoisseur since his youth, being closely associated with art circles in both Edinburgh and Liverpool, the President of both the Liverpool Artists' Club and the Dickens Fellowship. He was concerned with promoting Liverpudlian artists, and before becoming a curator, he had worked as an art critic for the *Liverpool Courier* (1887-1904), publishing several volumes on art and a few sheet songs. Between 1914 and 1918, he served as President of the MA. His publications included *A Biographical Account of Charles Dibdin* (1909) and *Liverpool Art and Artists in the Eighteenth Century* (Walpole Society Journal, 1918).[50] George Kirby (1845-1937), instead, came from a musical career, having been a lecturer of music and arranger of concerts before becoming the first curator of the City Art Gallery and Museum, York, in 1879. Similarly to CBS, he held his position for fifty-six years, retiring at ninety years of age.[51]

Both Dibdin and Kirby were examples of a generation learning their trade in newly-created galleries and that, due to the length of their careers, witnessed the development not only of those art galleries but also of the profession itself. Contrastingly, the next generation of curators - born after the consolidation of art galleries as stable institutions - usually had the opportunity to obtain theoretical museological training akin to contemporary curators before embarking on their careers. It is not by chance that his contemporaries described CBS as 'an active link between the Victorians and the art of our own day.'[52] The Laing had an example of this second generation of curators in Collingwood M. Stevenson, who, despite having started his career in the style of the previous generation (learning through practice and following in his father's footsteps at the Laing), could also access specialized academic learning. In fact, he obtained a Degree in English Language and Literature (King's College, Durham, 1938) and a Master of Arts (1941). He became a member of the

[50] Anon. 'The art exhibition'. *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* (05-03-1913), p.4b
[51] Morris, W. (ed.2014). *The Collected Letters of William Morris, Volume I: 1848-1880*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
[52] Geffen, I. (13-04-1957). 'Italian modern art collection in city.' *Evening Chronicle*, p.7d.

Society of Antiquaries (1938), a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (1946) and received his MA Diploma in 1955.[53]

One gallery, two museum theories

The aspect in which the curatorial generation gap between father and son is most noticeable relates to the Laing's values and goals. On the fiftieth anniversary of the opening, CBS reflected on the success of the Laing's policies in his text *The work of the Laing Art Gallery and Museum during the last fifty years* (1954). A year later, Collingwood Stevenson finished his thesis *A policy for a provincial Art Gallery* (1955), which complemented his father's ideas whilst echoing the newer post-war trends on museum theory that were then the core of the MA's discussions.

CBS' lifelong career goal was to provide the inhabitants of Newcastle with an art education. He believed that art galleries should aim to 'spread and encourage a knowledge of art in all its many forms and to foster and develop local talent in connection both with the fine arts and the applied arts.'[54] They ought to contain models from which inspiration could be obtained and technique could be learnt, as if they were a kind of textbook for art, design and crafts students. He therefore made sure that the Laing's museum section contained examples of decorative and industrial art which would 'stimulate interest in good design and craftsmanship', whilst periodical exhibitions illustrated 'the application of art to everyday life.'[55] The same goal was present both in the art and local history sections, as he stated at the MA Conference in Sheffield in 1917, where he defended the Laing's 'usefulness in discussing art knowledge and in extending educational facilities'.[56] He highlighted how the Laing's special exhibitions had each illustrated an important phase in art history, or how the Old Newcastle exhibition had been an opportunity to teach 'local history by means of pictures and objects arranged in chronological sequence to illustrate the Roman period,

[53] LCM 31-05-1957. TWA, MD.NC/129/7, p.92.
[54] Stevenson, C.B. (1954). 'The work of the Laing Art Gallery and Museum during the last fifty years', p.2. TWA, T.132/62.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Stevenson, C.B. (1917). 'Report on the Conference of Members of the Museums Association'. LCM 30-11-1917. TWA MD.NC/129/3, p.187.

the Norman, the Tudor, and on to recent times. Historical landmarks – The Town Wall, religious houses, the Tyne, the development of local industries, famous men, local inventions, each forming a subject for special study', because 'pictures and objects develop powers of visualization far more rapidly and realistically than other forms of education.'[57]

Besides the activities addressed to elementary schools, the Laing created a link with the King Edward VII School of Art and the School of Architecture (King's College, later Newcastle University). The bond was strengthened through CBS' lectures at the school and the students' work being exhibited at the Laing, but also through the loans of artworks from the Laing to the exhibitions of the School of Art and the offering of the Laing's facilities and resources for research.[58] This cooperation often led to the purchase of artworks from King's College teachers or former students, sometimes using the Glover Fund (see pp.239-245). It also underpinned the commission of the lunette paintings in the 1930s and the wall decorations in 1954 (see pp.93-108 and pp.140-142). The letters between CBS and Professor Richard George Hatton (1864-1926), who was also a Laing Committee member, evidence an exchange of professional advice, teaching resources and practical information, thus suggesting that the connection between British art schools and art galleries in the early twentieth century was probably as close as the one existing between fellow curators in regional art galleries.

These policies were linked to belief in the duty of public service of art galleries, which were thought to have the responsibility 'to raise the standard of public taste', and therefore needed to consider

> the special requirements of the various sections of the community to be served by the institution. These include the general public, possessing no special knowledge of art; the student who requires guidance; the research worker who needs every facility to assist him in the vital work of advancing the sum of human knowledge; the specialist and connoisseur who looks for strictly accurate information in the gallery's labels and publications; the designer and craftsman in search of ideas and standards of achievement; and finally, the never-

[57] Ibid.
[58] Op. cit. note 52, p.22.

> ending stream of enquirers who seek information on a wide variety of subjects.[59]

The idea echoes pre-war positionings of the MA stating that

> a museum or art gallery today must be frankly and actively educational, and must cater for not solely, or even mainly, for the requirements of the specialist or connoisseur, but for the intellectual, technical, and spiritual needs of the whole community, without distinction of class or vocation. There are no more promising educational agents or powerful stimulants to human imagination than the museum.[60]

CBS connected this aim with a will to 'spread the knowledge and the love of art among the people of the North-East' and to make the inhabitants of Newcastle aware of their heritage and of their own art tradition, which he tried to achieve through the Laing's loan exhibitions: 'the many and varied exhibitions which have been held at the Laing Art Gallery since the opening have done a great deal towards making the North East art-conscious.'[61] The idea of gaining power and self-awareness through knowledge led CBS' descriptions of the Laing's long-term goals. This may be a remnant of the nascent museum theories of the nineteenth century which he encountered in his early years, although, most probably, the thoughts written at the end of his life reflected his own achievements and the accrued social status he acquired through work and education.

Although very close in time, Collingwood Stevenson's thesis *A policy for a provincial Art Gallery* (1955) diverges in its conception of museum theory, probably influenced by the generalized post-war 'resurgence of the traditional functions of museums, with the care of the collections once again taking priority over the interest of the audience.'[62] Like many other post-war curators, Collingwood looked back to older texts like *The Principles of Museum Administration* (Dr. Brown Goode, 1895) to emphasize the roles of storage, exhibition and preservation of art galleries, and to the *Romanes Lecture on*

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[59] Op. cit. note 52.
[60] Wignall, E.W., ed. (1939). *Museums Journal* vol.39, p.242-245.
[61] Op. cit. note 52, p.9.
[62] Pearson, C. (2017). *Museums in the Second World War. Curators, culture and change*. London and New York: Routledge, p.256.

Museums and National Life (Sir Frederick Kenyon, 1927) to underline the museums' duty to stimulate the sense of beauty, curiosity and continuity with the past.[63] He also collected the MA's recommendations regarding the galleries' aims of collecting and conserving material and interpreting it for the public, whilst advising students, facilitating research, stimulating the recreational interest of visitors and collaborating with local learned societies.[64] But, although he believed that art galleries had the obligation 'to teach the visitors how to see art, and to train the eye through lectures, art-appreciation classes and guided tours of the gallery', he disagreed with the Markham Report in the idea that education should be the main aim of an art gallery. Collingwood explained that this conception was the result of the work being done in the American museums and galleries, and he highlighted that education should be the aim for museums, but not for art galleries.[65] On this matter, he quoted Guy Eglinton's emphasis of the autonomous value of art: 'art does not exist for education. What we call art is a fragment of life which has miraculously survived the centuries.'[66] This almost religious respect for art itself as a supernatural creation which did not have to be explained nor understood can be connected to the loss of cultural relevance of the museum institution in the 1950s, which also affected the Laing.[67] Although Collingwood acknowledged that 'the average visitor requires some further assistance and guidance to let him on, gradually, to a true appreciation of art, and this can be provided in the form of exhibitions, lectures, gallery talks and film shows', he insisted that this was not the real purpose of an art gallery: 'the aim of the activities is not to make the gallery a lively place, but to connect people with art', and 'the real purpose of an art gallery is to bring people into close contact with this inner life, this vital force, which lies at the core of every great work of art.'[68] Collingwood asserted that - in order to achieve that contact - visitors had to be left alone in their mystical experience, thus

[63] Stevenson, C.M. (1955). *A policy for a provincial Art Gallery*. (Thesis for the Diploma of the Museums Association, U.K.), p.3. MSA.
[64] Ibid, p.4.
[65] Ibid p.9.
[66] Eglinton, G. (1931). *Reaching for Art.* Boston: May & Co., p.144.
[67] Op. cit. note 52.
[68] Op. cit. note 61, p.6.

confronting his father's lifetime task of accompaniment and guidance of museum audiences.

A late recognition

Although CBS had been leading the Laing for over half a century, the energy and enthusiasm he put into his work made many of his fellow citizens think he was younger than his real age: one of local press obituaries registered shock at his age because 'he looked like a man in his sixties.'[69] Maybe the Laing Committee shared this feeling, and that is the reason why no one thought about paying CBS a tribute until his death, which seemed to take everyone by surprise, since he worked until the last day of his life, and died in his sleep the night after having actively participated in a Committee meeting. The Jubilee exhibition carefully planned for 1954 was shelved, which is unfortunate, as it could have given the much-needed official recognition to CBS' work. Only after he died did the magnitude of his achievements for the Laing become evident, collected both in the obituaries and in the articles related to the Memorial Exhibition – which Collingwood Stevenson curated under Committee request, which thus became his first task as the new curator of the Laing.

Journalists and art critics wrote about CBS' personality, highlighting the elements that helped him reach the vital goal of transforming wood shavings into an art collection. All the newspaper articles noted the way in which the Laing collection was created (out of nothing, and without funds), and owed the success to CBS' fortunate and unique fusion of charm, expertise and enthusiasm, stating that 'his personality ensured that numerous gifts came to the gallery – an achievement for which the city's ratepayers (whose expenditure on the gallery does them little credit) have cause to be grateful'.[70] Or also, 'among his gifts, Bernard Stevenson had that of persuasion, and the gallery has benefited by many bequests'.[71] The artist Adrian Bury was thankful that CBS

[69] Anon (01-04-1957). 'He built up the Laing Art Gallery out of nothing.' *Northern Echo,* p.4d.
[70] Geffen, I. (03-10-1957). 'Exhibition memorial to curator.' *Evening Chronicle,* p.5c.
[71] Anon (25-09-1957). "Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle. Exhibition in memory of first curator. *The Times,* p.11e.

'was always available with friendly advice on art matters', and described him as 'one of the most genial as well as creative custodians of public galleries'.[72] And the *Northern Echo* pointed out that he had offered his resignation to the Art Gallery Committee many times, but 'because of his unique position had been persuaded to carry on. "You are the gallery", a member of the committee once told him'.[73] The same article also described him on duty at the gallery: '"jolly" was one of his favourite words, and many times as one walked round the exhibitions with him he would reserve this expression for the prize piece'.[74] Newspapers also criticised the Council's insufficient investment in art and the Committee's failure to recognise CBS's efforts: the Memorial Exhibition 'was remarkably well displayed and would have delighted Mr Stevenson. But the finest memorial which Newcastle could erect to its distinguished servant would be to treble the purchasing grant available to the son who has succeeded him.'[75] A suggestion to the Committee was also made: 'as a final mark of respect, his Committee might perhaps consider naming one of the existing four rooms after him, and keeping it permanently filled with some of his treasures'.[76] Perhaps it is still not too late to follow that advice.

B. RUNNING A NEW ART GALLERY

The Laing not only started as an empty gallery, but it was also the first art gallery in a city without a significant experience of art display or museum management and where the interest in collecting had hitherto been limited to private patrons. Delving into a context where everything was yet to be created, this section focuses on the first steps of the Laing as a public institution, emphasizing its objectives as an agent at the service of citizens, discussing the degree of commitment of public authorities in the creation and provision of the gallery and its collections, and deciding to what extent there was a willingness to offer a quality public service.

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[72] Bury, A. (04-04-1957). 'Mr. C.B. Stevenson.' *The Times,* p.12f.
[73] Op. cit. note 67.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Geffen, I. (03-10-1957). 'Exhibition memorial to curator.' *Evening Chronicle,* p.5c.
[76] W.E.J. (06-04-1957). 'He charmed treasures from connoisseurs' homes.' *Evening Chronicle*, p.4b.

Different elements set the Laing's impact in Newcastle's cultural life. Firstly, there was the Laing Committee, understood as the body with the ultimate authority in the decision-making processes and the channel through which the particular needs of the gallery were communicated to the politicians of the municipality. The analysis of the composition of the first committee has provided a discernment of the knowledge and experience of its members regarding gallery management. Secondly, the exhibition calendar and the educational activities have been studied as the mechanisms used to create a link with the citizenship.

The appointment of the first Committee

As discussed in chapter 1, the adoption of the Public Libraries Act (1892) gave the Newcastle Public Library the power to influence the origins of the Laing. Indeed, it was the Public Libraries Committee which, in 1903, asked the Council to delegate to a Committee 'the powers and duties of general management, regulation and control [of the Laing], except that such committee shall not incur any expenditure which is not included in the estimates submitted to and approved by the council annually'.[77] It was also the Library Committee which decided the number and even the name of the first members of the Laing Committee, reducing the original twenty-four members (twelve internal to the Council and twelve external) in Alexander Laing's Deed of Gift to eighteen, 'of whom nine should be members of the Public Libraries Committee, and nine should be gentlemen who are not members of the Council'.[78] Mr Laing did not object to this alteration, maybe because his approval had been secured by previously appointing him as a member of the Public Libraries Committee, or maybe because he 'had been seriously unwell for a considerable time'.[79] Apparently, Alderman Newton, Chairman of the Public Libraries Committee – and, later, Vice-Chairman of the Laing Committee - was the person in charge of choosing the nine Council members for the Laing Committee out of twenty-six

[77] NCR 11-03-1903, p.251. L352.042- N536N.
[78] NCR 02-09-1903. P. 622 L352.042- N536N.
[79] Op. cit. note 50.

possible Council members who were, in turn, part of the forty-strong Public Libraries Committee.

Instead, the nine outsiders of the Laing were decided by Laing himself (fig.6). His decision not to appoint artists raised debate in the Council, and has even been denounced as one of the reasons for the declining influence of local artists' groups, an assumption easily refutable by analysing the gallery's engagement with Northern art (see pp.239-270).[80] Clearly, Mr. Laing privileged social status over art knowledge in his appointments, on the belief that his gallery would be best served by wealthy and influential members who could then act as donors and patrons.[81] Although some of the founding members were also keen collectors, none of them bore practical knowledge regarding museum management, in what was a general trend for many regional galleries. Indeed, the MA lamented the fact that members of museums committees were usually 'recruited from classes that have little knowledge of, nor active interest in, museum work.'[82] Like in most galleries, the Laing Committee members were often elderly, had commitments in the companies they owned or overlapped membership in several committees, so their attendance to meetings and exhibitions' openings was irregular and troublesome.[83] Therefore, it was only after CBS' arrival that any practical consideration was given to arrangements regarding the Laing's impending opening.

The relationship with the curator

It must not have been easy for CBS, who in 1904 was just thirty years old, to face this large group of respectable intellectuals and businessmen, belonging to a social class higher than his own, and holding considerable fortunes and

[80] 'The Laing Art Gallery itself seems to have been at least partly responsible for the decline in the artists' public role. Firstly, local artists were sidelined from the management of the gallery and secondly, the Laing did not wish to work with other artists' groups.' In Mumba, R. (2008) *Class, nation and localism in the Northumberland art world, 1820-1939*, (Doctoral thesis, Durham University, Durham, U.K.). Retrieved from http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2243/, p.181.
[81] Newton, L. (2003). *Cullercoats: A North-East Colony of Artists.* Bristol: Sansom & Co, p.83.
[82] Bailey, J., ed. (1909). *Museums Journal,* vol 20, p.125.
[83] The issue of failed attendance was thoroughly discussed during the Laing's early years and gradually led to the decision to spread the meetings from a monthly to a bi-monthly schedule. On the same way, pressure had to be exerted to increase the Committee members' attendance to the openings. LCM 08-02-1952 and 30-05-1952. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.176 and p.186.

NAME	PUBLIC LIBRARIES COMMITTEE MEMBER	BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES
Alexander Laing (1827-1905).	yes	Scottish wine and spirits merchant. He came to Newcastle from a Forfarshire village in 1849.
Sir Matthew White Ridley, 5th Baronet and 1st Viscount Ridley (1842-1904)	no	Conservative statesman, was a member of the Parliament for North Northumberland (1868-1885) and served as Home Secretary (1895-1900).[84] He died within one month of the Laing opening, being replaced by his son.
Lord William Henry Armstrong Fitzpatrick Watson-Armstrong, 1st Baron Armstrong (1863-1941)	no	Grand-nephew and heir of the famous engineer, he served in the Northumberland Hussars, being promoted to Major on 12 April 1902. He was High Sheriff of Northumberland in 1899 and was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of Northumberland in 1901.[85]
Dr Thomas Hodgkin, D.C.L. (1831-1913)	yes	Member of the Lit and Phil, like Robert Spence Watson and the later Laing Committee member R. Oliver Heslop. Barrister and later a partner in the banking house 'Hodgkin, Barnett, Pease and Spence', Newcastle. Devoted much time to historical studies, specialising in the history of the early middle ages.[86]
Dr Robert Spence Watson (1837-1911)	yes	Solicitor, reformer, politician and writer. He became famous for pioneering labour arbitrations. Secretary to the Lit and Phil (1862-1893), and President of the same (1901-1911). Co–founder of the Durham College of Science in 1871, he became its first president in 1910. He was instrumental in the founding of the Newcastle Free Public Library. Founder of the Newcastle Liberal Club and its president for twenty-three years. Like Wigham Richardson and Thomas Hodgkin, he was a Quaker. [87]

[84] Lucas, R. & Ridley, J. (2004). 'Ridley, Matthew White, first Viscount Ridley (1842–1904).' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35754.
[85] 'Person Page – 5220.' *The Peerage.* http://thepeerage.com/p5220.htm#i52195.
[86] 'Thomas Hodgkin Archive.' *Newcastle University Library.* https://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/special-collections/collections/collection_details.php?id=151.
[87] 'Robert Spence Watson.' *Watson Burton Solicitors*. http://www.watsonburton.com/page/robertspencewatson.cfm.

Mr. John Davisdon Milburn (1851-1907)	no	Partner in the family business Wm. Milburn & Co., an international ship trade company owning some of the finest and fastest sailing ships of the day and ranked among the top five in the world tonnage league. The family also owned Ashington Colliery, the largest and one of the most prosperous collieries in Britain. He was the director/chairman of several North East companies, a JP for Northumberland and the High Sheriff for the county in 1905, in which year he was created a baronet.[88]
Mr. George Dixon Atkinson-Clark (1836-1921)	no	Owner of Belford Hall, in Northumberland. Chairman of the Northumberland Quarter Sessions (1905-1917. Chairman of the Belford Board of Guardians and the Northumberland Sea Fisheries Committee. High Sherriff, Deputy Lieutenant and Magistrate for Northumberland.[89]
Mr. Wigham Richardson (1837–1908)	no	Shipbuilder and founder of the Neptune Works, which later became Swan, Hunter, and Wigham Richardson Ltd, the largest merchant shipbuilding company on the Tyne. Enthusiast about arts and culture, art collector, traveller and amateur poet and watercolourist. Bequeathed an art purchasing fund to the Walker Mechanics Institute, which was devolved to the Laing in 1925 (see pp.233-239).[90]
Mr. John Lamb (1831-1908)	no	Liverpool-born architect, estate agent, engineer and property surveyor for Gateshead and Newcastle Councils, locally known for his work in connection to the Grainger Estate. He was also a keen collector of Northern art, and upon his death he bequeathed the Laing with forty-six paintings of artists such as H.H. Emmerson, C. Napier-Hemy and T.M. Richardson Senr.[91]

Fig.6. The founding non-Council members of the Laing Committee. TWA.

[88] 'The Milburn Family.' *Friends of Jesmond Old Cemetery.* http://www.jesmondoldcemetery.co.uk/milburn_49.html.
[89] Anon (07-04-1921). 'The Late Mr. G.D. Atkinson-Clark'. *Newcastle Daily Chronicle,* p.2f.
[90] Pimlott Baker, A. (2004). 'Richardson, John Wigham (1837–1908)'. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/48151
[91] Anon (07-09-1908). 'Death of Mr. John Lamb'. *Newcastle Daily Chronicle,* p.8d.

personal contacts. However, from the beginning the Committee seemed to acknowledge the curator's expertise and commissioned him to carry out the steps that he had previously suggested to be necessary, although often those had to be accompanied by long reports, written in a didactic way that suggests CBS' awareness that his readers on the Committee were a mostly non-specialized audience. Because of its double-headed management, the Laing, like many regional galleries, represented an ambiguous hierarchy: on the one hand, CBS exercised more or less openly the role of director, being the highest paid employee and the one who spent the most time in the gallery. On the other hand, CBS' work needed the approval of the Committee, whose monthly schedule delayed decision-making, and which also assigned him tasks as bizarre as choosing the fabric for the uniforms of the gallery attendants, or checking if his own salary was in line with those of other public art galleries (see pp.163-166).[92] In general, though, CBS showed great flexibility in fulfilling the Committee requests - surely the years obeying Wallis' orders helped him in this respect -, but also the Committee was supportive of his work in difficult times. Probably, when Collingwood Stevenson described the ideal interaction between a curator and his Committee, he was taking his father as an example:

> It is [the curator's] duty to make every effort to win the full and wholehearted support of his committee. […] If the curator gives a clear indication of the aims he has in view, the methods by which he proposes to achieve them, and the beneficial results which he expects to follow, there is a very good chance that the committee will adopt his policy, either as it stands or with certain modifications dictated by the need for economy.[93]

The earliest example of the Committee's respect for CBS' decisions took place even before the opening of the Laing. Before CBS' appointment, the Laing Committee had asked the collector and art critic Marion Harry Spielmann (1858-1948) to become Consultative Adviser or Director of the Laing, at a remuneration of £100 a year.[94] Spielman showed interest in the offer, but he

[92] LCM 26-02-1909. TWA, MD.NC/129/2, p.69.
[93] Op. cit. note 61, p.1.
[94] LCM 07-05-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.13. For details regarding Spielmann's career and relevance in the late Victorian and Edwardian art world, see Codell, J.F. (1989). 'Marion Harry Spielmann and the Role of the Press in the Professionalization of Artists'. *Victorian Periodicals Review* Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 7-15.

posed several questions. Firstly, he wanted to clarify how much work he had to do for that salary. Secondly, he wanted to know the number of exhibitions that the Laing intended to hold per year, how much should he work in the actual organisation of those exhibitions, and whether the gallery would cover the expenses for his visits to Newcastle to hang the exhibitions. Besides, he asked about the general scope of the Laing, and whether the aim was to have periodical exhibitions, or to form a permanent collection, or both. Lastly, he wanted to know what term of years the appointment would be.[95]

Spielman's questions apparently troubled the Committee, as they postponed the response until having hired a curator: this was, in fact, the first consultation made to CBS, even before his arrival to Newcastle. Demonstrating an impressive level of self-confidence for someone who had been appointed just a week earlier, the young curator stated that an external adviser would

> complicate matters very considerably. I am sure that you will agree that my lengthy experience in the great art institutions of this city justifies my taking over the selection and custody of the collections. The expense is unnecessary, and I am convinced that we can more satisfactorily manage our own affairs. I may add that if advice is necessary, I am in touch with the highest living authorities upon art matters and can obtain the same free of expense to the Corporation.[96]

This strong beginning apparently had the effect of nurturing respect for CBS' future decisions, even when they seemed risky, or were questioned by sectors of local society. The best-known example is related to the Shipley Bequest (1909), when CBS ascertained that most of Shipley's paintings were copies.[97] Although this controversial opinion provoked an intense public debate, the Laing's Committee supported the curator's much criticised proposal of accepting the Bequest in order to access its monetary component as well as a selection of Shipley's better paintings.[98]

[95] LCM 03-06-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.20
[96] LCM 04-07-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.23
[97] Stevenson, C.B. (1909) 'Report on the Shipley Bequest.' LCM30-4-1909. TWA MD/NC/129/2, p.75-84.
[98] Op. cit. note 42.

Managing finance

The first Committee meeting took place in October 1903, around one year before the opening. Until February 1904, the building fittings and the money needed for them were the main concerns for the Committee members. This need had already been identified by the Public Libraries Committee, so the Newcastle Council had been asked 'to make application to the Local government board for sanction to borrow £2,000 on the security of the Library rate, repayable over as long a term of years as possible.'[99] But it was not until March 1904 that the Laing Committee sent its first estimates to the Library Committee, together with a request for the Council to vote for the additional funds. The cost of maintaining the gallery for the first year was calculated in about £2,000, an amount clearly insufficient to cover the expenses, thus suggesting a certain financial optimism from the Committee, probably due to the aforementioned lack of practical museum knowledge (fig.7). This impression is confirmed by the forecast for the 1905 budget, calculated at around £3,000, of which the Laing Committee expected to spend only half and invest the remaining half in artworks. A closer look at the real estimates for 1905, approved a few months later, proves that, effectively, the costs were higher than it was first thought, as they included items not considered the year before (fig.8).

Still, these second-year estimates did not cover the expense for pictures: the issue was expected to be solved by requesting a further £1,000 from the Public Libraries Committee, but this additional debt was finally not allowed.[100] Therefore, by the end of 1905, and despite the £957.13.6 collected in the first two years through entrance fees and the sale of catalogues, the gallery owed the Public Library a total of £3,472.16.11. The situation should have improved in 1906 after the authorization to levy a half penny rate was obtained, but once that happened, the Public Libraries Committee decided that the time has arrived for the Laing to start repaying its debt, on quotes of £500 per annum. Once

[99] NCR 11-03-1903. L352.042- N536N, p.250
[100] LCM 20-01-905. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.105.

Electric light		£130
Fuel		£30
Decorations, window cleaning, and repairs to the building		£45
Stationery, printing of catalogues, and advertising		£60
Rates and taxes		£60
Attendants' wages	- Two at £2 a week each	£208
	- Two at 30/- a week each	£156
Carriage of pictures and objects for museum		£30
Picture hanging and repairs		£60
Expenses of exhibitions (collecting of pictures, etc)		£60
Insurance of pictures, etc.		£100
Sundry expenses (including porters' uniforms)		£70
Curator's salary		£300
Consultative adviser		£100
Expenses of promoting inaugural loan exhibition		£500
Contingencies		£200
Total		£2,109

Fig.7. The Laing's first estimates. TWA MD/NC/129/1.

Salaries and wages	£750
Constable (special) for night duty	£78
Coal	£50
Electric light	£300
Insurance	£250
Stationery, printing and advertising	£200
Fittings and repairs	£100
Telephone	£10
Agency	£150
Obtaining loans of works of art	£50
Photographing	£10
Uniforms	£15
Cleaning and materials	£50
Rates and taxes	£60
Carriage of pictures	£80
Contingencies	£100
TOTAL	£2,153

Fig.8. Estimated expenditure for 1905. TWA MD/NC/129/1.

again, the Laing did not have any allowance for purchases, so that it was not until the following year (1907) that the first £707 for purchases was authorised.

This initial absence of a purchasing allowance conditioned the Committee's early decisions regarding exhibitions and events and limited the scope of CBS' work and the Laing's ambition to become the primary public art institution in Newcastle. It is worth noting the dual and somewhat ambiguous role of some of the Laing Committee members, who were, on one side, asking for funding for the Laing at the Laing Committee meetings, and then asking for the loan to be returned once they were acting as members of the Public Libraries Committee. Also surprising is the disproportion between the budget of the library and that of the art gallery, which allowed the first to save every year, open new branches and even buy land thinking about hypothetical extensions, while the second struggled to stay open and did not even have a fund with which to buy the necessary equipment, much less, the paintings for the collection. As commented in chapter 2, this prioritisation of libraries over regional art galleries was frequent, with similar examples in Leeds, Oldham and Bury.[101]

At that time, no grant-aid system existed, nor experience of fund-raising had been developed yet, so financial problems were a common concern for most regional galleries. Reports on the matter were issued by curators such as Whitworth Wallis (Birmingham Art Gallery), R.E. Dibdin and Elijah Howarth (Sheffield City Museum).[102] And yet, local elites could not understand that museums needed public funding. For instance, in 1909 the Newcastle Ratepayers Association complained against the Laing's expenditure, on the grounds that the previous year the gallery had received £300 from the Board of Education for the purchase of works of art. Purchases that year had amounted to £707.10.0, which was judged to be against the resolution adopted by the Council in 1903, that the Laing would not incur any expenditure not included in the estimates of the Public Libraries Committee. The Ratepayers Association believed that 'the portion of the Library Rate given to the Laing cannot be

[101] Inferiority towards libraries could even be emphasized physically through the use of hierarchical buildings. For more details, see Waterfield, G. (2015). *The People's Galleries.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p.169.
[102] Op. cit. note 28, p.92.

applied in making good any loss on loan exhibitions, or in purchases of works of art.'[103] The 'loss' on exhibitions since 1904 amounted, according to the Association, to £2,000, 'which would have gone a long way in paying the balance of £2,493 due to the city treasurer from the Laing.'[104] Complaints continued the following year, when the Laing was described as 'an expensive white elephant, which costs £2,000 per annum!', on top of its collection being deemed worthless: 'it is being rapidly filled up by a permanent collection out of which it could be difficult to select six pictures really worth of preservation'.[105] The Laing was not alone in being subjected to such disdain: in 1928 the Miers Report found museums 'the least valued of the municipal services', with even good museums receiving less than a 1/2d rate, which led to underfunding, understaffing, low pay levels, cramped buildings, outdated displays and octogenarian curators unable to retire without a pension.[106]

Another subject broadly fought by regional curators was the liability of museums to pay rates. The subject arose periodically in the MA meetings: for instance, there were discussions in 1905 in connection with the ruling against the corporation of Liverpool to maintain exemption for its library, and similar problems in the Plymouth and Birmingham art galleries. As in some cases, museums had achieved exemptions by placing themselves under the Scientific Societies Act 1843, the MA hoped that museums would receive statutory relief from local rates through the Local Rating Bill 1923 due to their scientific and cultural nature, an attempt that was unsuccessful.[107] Newcastle Council was not an exception to this situation, and the Laing kept on paying (and complaining against) Council taxes overtime: for instance, in 1926-1927 these amounted up to £351.6.8.[108]

[103] Anon (9-3-1909). 'Newcastle's Finances'. *North Mail,* n.p.
[104] Ibid.
[105] 'B. Canny' (17-3-1910). 'Thirty thousand pounds.' *North Mail,* n.p.
[106] Op. cit. note 28, p.163.
[107] Op. cit. note 40, p.26.
[108] TWA T.132-54.

The Laing staff

On starting his duties, CBS stated that at least six workers were needed, whose appointment would have a weekly cost of £8.2.0, and who would be divided into the following roles: Chief Clerk (£1.15.0 per week), Typist or Junior Clerk (15.0 per week), three attendants and an engineer (£1.8.0 weekly each).[109] The Committee's assistance went only as far as appointing two of the attendants, whilst CBS was left on his own to appoint the rest of the staff while preparing the inaugural exhibition. Laverna Stevenson described the added stress this created for the curator:

> This year [1904] was a nightmare more or less. C.B.S. spent his days interviewing the County magnates. In the evenings he spent his time at the Gallery - usually staying until the last tram had gone and having to walk home and after a meal literally thrown down, he would turn to do clerical work until two or three in the morning. He rarely had more than four hours in bed. I used to say he couldn't go on like that, but he took no notice. The committee had also left him to appoint his own staff. The first man appointed was old Mackintyre [sic] - one of Hughes' [a local art business] men, who proved a good foreman albeit somewhat cantankerous. He was there for many years and various other men were gradually recommended.[110]

She also revealed CBS' controversial decision to appoint his father-in-law, Mr. Maltby, as Chief Clerk, something that 'never worked although at first it was a great relief to have someone trustworthy to look after things at the Gallery while C.B.S. was scouring the countryside for suitable works of art.'[111] Maltby's presence at the gallery was also useful when the foreseeable nervous breakdown occurred and doctors forced CBS to stay away from the Laing, although it caused trouble after the curator's return:

> During this time my Father had been interviewing all callers at the Gallery, who quite thought they were talking to the Curator and when C.B.S. came back, all these people were inclined to ignore him. This of course caused friction and annoyance […] People not in the know naturally supposed this elderly gentleman was the man of authority and tended to ignore the boyish looking individual who was the actual head.[112]

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[109] LCM 21-07-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.32.
[110] Op. cit. note 7, p.76.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid, p. 77.

There are no references to the date when Maltby quitted his position, but apparently, CBS did not get a specialized assistant until 1908, when Sydney Lightfoot Davison was appointed as Assistant Curator, a role he occupied until 1922, when he left the Laing to become the first Curator of the Lady Leverhulme Art Gallery (see pp.103-108).[113] Although it is not known who replaced him, a draft about the Laing's staff structure dating from 1930 mentions two assistants and five attendants.[114] In 1931, the Carnegie Trustees covered the expenses of a T. Wake, who attended a curatorial training in Edinburgh, so probably this was the Assistant Curator on duty at that moment. The next person holding the role, from 1943 until CBS' death, was Collingwood Stevenson.

The data regarding the Laing staff reflects the general situation of British regional galleries in the early twentieth century, with its symptomatic insufficient, unskilled, underpaid and untrained workforce. As the Markham Report denounced, a dustman employed by the London County Council was better paid than an experienced assistant curator, the lack of recognised qualifications for the profession being a further handicap.[115] For the Laing, this situation did not change significantly during the greatest part of CBS' curatorship: already in the 1940s, the curator kept on declaring the urgency for a review, because, 'despite the volume of work has been steadily increasing during the last forty years, and especially during the last six years, the number of staff has remained the same except for the addition of one officer.'[116] Even in the 1950s, the gallery still lacked a conservator, something that worried CBS, who asked other museum directors about their procedures in this matter.[117] Concerns about the staff numbers, salaries and qualifications were constant, with consultations to other galleries on these issues sent on at least three more occasions: 1909 (annual expense in salaries), 1950 (night attendants' wages) and 1953 (number of workers, duties and wages). These elements suggest that the Laing was trying to scrimp on staff expenses in order to have a larger budget for the

[113]Anon (12-09-1922). "Newcastle's man success. Curator of Leverhulme Art Gallery". *Illustrated Chronicle,* p.7e.
[114] Stevenson, C.B. (1930). 'Report for the Museums Association', p.1. TWA, T132/62.
[115] Markham, S.F. (1938). *A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of the British Isles (other than the National Museums) to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees.* Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust, p.61.
[116] Stevenson, CB (26-04-1946). 'Report about the staff.' TWA, MD/NC/129/6 p.30-33.
[117] Letters to C.B. Stevenson from regional gallery directors (1955). 'Papers about History of the Laing, 1904-1967.' TWA, T.132/62.

purchase of artworks. The struggle is confirmed by the fact that CBS did not allow himself to get an assistant until the arrival of the first funds for purchases (1908), although this help would have been especially necessary in the first years of operation. The decision to put the Laing's collection before his own health had serious consequences, as Laverna Stevenson's memoirs point out:

> For many, many months [during 1905] I had a great fight with him. He would go down to the Gallery but I had to go with him and very frequently he would insist on getting out at each station saying how bad he felt. […] He gradually improved, some days better, some worse, but it was quite four years [1909] before he was really himself again.[118]

The Laing Committee must have been aware of the curator's troubles, although the only solution offered were periods off, which he spent at different 'treatment homes'. Not surprisingly, the improvement in CBS' health coincided with Davison's appointment, thus suggesting a division of labours taking place from that point onwards.

The opening arrangements

After appointing workers, the next decisions regarded the opening date. In July this had been fixed for September, but had to be postponed as the gallery was not yet ready.[119] Further discussions regarded the timetables and the entrance fees. Ample timetables (10am to 9pm) were agreed upon, which suggests the Committee expected the loan exhibition to be extremely popular.[120] After the closure of the inaugural exhibition, these opening times were reduced, but still kept longer than the current ones, as the gallery stayed open from Mondays to Thursdays until 6 in winter and 7 in summer, Fridays and Saturdays until 7, and Sundays from 3 to 5.[121] Although Edwardian museums have been reported to have been less popular than their Victorian predecessors, the Laing kept its

[118] Op. cit. note 7, p.80-81.
[119] LCM 16-09-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.76.
[120] LCM 04-07-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.26.
[121] LCM 22-02-1905. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.114.

long opening hours, with discounts at the end of the working day, thus evidencing its success in attracting crowds.[122]

The fact that the opening exhibition had an entrance fee was criticised in a Council meeting. Alderman Newton's response reveals the Committee's plans to arrange loan exhibitions

> from time to time as circumstances arose. The gathering of a loan exhibition was a difficult and a costly matter. It involved considerable outlay in transit, in packing, in insurance, and in protecting the valuable property when it was under their care, so that it was absolutely necessary that a charge should be made. Gentlemen who lent works, worth £15,000 in some instances, might readily be understood to be exceedingly anxious that proper protection should be afforded to their works. The gallery was opened on terms and at prices which the very humblest of their people, anxious to see fine pictures, could afford to pay; while it had been arranged that after 6pm, the price of admission should be reduced to 3d. After this loan exhibition the gallery would be absolutely free, and that would probably be for ten months of the year. He hoped, therefore, that there would be no further objection to the payment for admission, because, in addition to paying expenses, any surplus that might be left would be used to purchase pictures for the permanent use of the gallery.[123]

Once again, this speech evidences the optimism regarding the formation of the permanent collection, as the Committee hoped not only to keep the gallery free for most of the year, but also to get a permanent collection through the earnings made by charging an entrance fee two months a year, from which they would deduct the transit, packing and insurance costs of the artworks loaned. As can be imagined, a few months later the final financial balance of the inaugural exhibition showed that these provisions did not add up.

In the remaining months of 1904, further decisions shaped the working rules of the newly-created gallery. Firstly, reduced fees and permission for students to copy the pictures were arranged, with an eagerness that confirms the Laing's engagement with art education.[124] Secondly, after the sale of a picture from the inaugural exhibition, it was decided to claim commissions on sales and to

[122] Hill, K. (2005). *Culture and class in public museums, 1850-1914.* Aldershot: Ashgate, p.14.
[123] NCR 31-10-1904. L352- N536 (1), p.82.
[124] LCM15-12-1904. TWA, MD/NC/129/1, p. 94.

devote them to a purchasing fund.[125] This decision - taken on the spot after CBS explained that it was usual custom to keep a commission of 5% of the price of pictures sold from loan exhibitions - marks an interesting precedent, as it evidences the Laing's attempts to exploit every means of funding purchases, thus promoting a business plan akin to a private gallery, a good example being the exhibitions of the Northern Counties (see pp.246-270).

The inaugural exhibition

The first mention of an opening exhibition dates back to 3 June 1904. As this was the same meeting in which CBS was appointed, feasibly the idea came from the interview with the curator-to-be.[126] A letter from CBS sent to the Laing Committee shortly after confirms this assumption. In it, CBS expressed his need to see the building as soon as possible, in order to 'report upon the necessary fittings and case requirements for an exhibition of decorative art on the ground floor, after approval of Committee'.[127] He also described his first arrangements 'for an exhibition of oils and watercolours thoroughly representative of British Art', thus suggesting that he had probably already decided upon the policy to be followed for the creation of the collections (see pp.206-210). Probably motivated by the awareness that there was 'nothing but shavings to make an exhibition of - no staff - no nucleus collection - just nothing', already on his first day CBS accelerated the Committee's decision process by requesting forty exhibition cases.[128] The exhibition dates were decided, and the first instructions for the creation of a catalogue were arranged.[129]

Then, the race against the clock for achieving loans started, and the curator knocked on every possible door, sending letters to both public and private owners, regionally and nationally. Between July and October 1904, each Executive Committee minute is filled with long reports of the applications made and the loans obtained. By August, thirty public museums and 157 private

[125] LCM 22-02-1905. TWA, MD/NC/129/1, p.113.
[126] LCM 03-06-1904. TWA, MD.NC/129/1, p.20.
[127] Stevenson, C.B. (08-06-1904). Letter to the Laing Committee. In LCM 04-07-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.23.
[128] Op. cit. note 7, p.75.
[129] LCM 04-07-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.26.

lenders had already been contacted. Some of the earliest offers came from artists, such as Wyke Bayliss (1835-1906), John Charlton (1849-1917), N.M. Lund (1863-1916), John Reid (1851-1926), Solomon J. Solomon (1860-1927) and Albert Toft (1862-1949), probably attracted by the opportunity to publicly exhibit their works and to start a relationship which could later lead to purchases, as actually happened with Charlton, Lund or Toft.[130] Similarly, famous dealers like Agnew offered loans, probably understanding the Laing's request as the prelude to a new business opportunity. But the most remarkable success of the loans' request process was engaging the local collectors to share their treasures, thus forming a precedent in the Laing's relationship with these cultural elites, whilst allowing CBS to start developing the regional network which he would later use extensively. Some of these lenders were Lowthian Bell, G.E. Henderson, the widow of the artist C.W. Mitchell Jr. (1854-1903) and Henry Percy, 7th Duke of Northumberland (1846-1918), but also Laing Committee members such as John Lamb, J.D. Milburn, Lord Armstrong and Viscount Ridley. By the opening date, the value of the loans received had exceeded £200,000.[131]

Local press reports described the exhibition as a resounding success and acknowledged CBS' efforts, highlighting that there had never been so many masterpieces in the North of England before, and that every famous collection in the country was represented.[132] The efforts to secure the loans, the tasteful hanging and the cataloguing, as well as the curator's experience and carefulness were praised. Nevertheless, the workload was overwhelming for the curator, who not only was new to the position and to the region, but who also felt pressured to demonstrate his abilities before the committee and the entire city, while helping to save the small gallery budget by training an unskilled and insufficient staff to handle, unpack and hang the pictures on the go instead of hiring a transport company. This strain, coupled with the lack of time, precipitated his nervous breakdown:

> The day before the opening, C.B.S. was dressing when he suddenly said: 'I think I am going mad!' and seemed quite incapable of any

[130] LCM 28-07-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.34.
[131] LCM 01-09-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.62-65.
[132] Anon (13-10-1904). 'The Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle'. *Newcastle Journal,* p.4f.

> further effort, although there were one hundred and one things wanted finishing up. […] [Dr Lyle] said – 'You must leave everything and take your Husband out for the whole day. […] C.B.S. demurred and said he must go down to the Gallery as there was still much to finish. 'Well,' said Dr Lyle, 'if you do, you will not be there tomorrow.' […] The fresh air certainly seemed to calm him down - and he was able to be at the official opening the next day, Dr Lyle being present to keep an eye on him. All passed off with great success. It was the finest exhibition ever seen out of London. Every gallery was filled with the choicest work of art the County could furnish, also the museum. It had been a colossal undertaking, and everybody was staggered at the result of his three month's work.
>
> […] We had a cab to go home in. On the way, C.B.S. fell into the deepest sleep, from which we couldn't rouse him. Mr. Isaacs [a friend] helped the cab man to get him into the house, but he didn't rouse, and we fixed him up on the settee and he slept and slept on. This probably saved the situation but was very frightening for me - we never got him to bed that night.[133]

The Laing Committee may have also felt the double pressure to prove before the Council that the art gallery was on the one hand a necessary service for Newcastle, and on the other hand, a financially viable institution. Therefore, in the first months they undertook thorough process of data collection in order to capture the reaction of Newcastle's population to the opening of the city's first public art gallery. Over 3,100 people visited the Laing in its first five days, although nearly two thirds of them attended on Sunday (the free entrance day), this evidencing both curiosity towards the new institution and some reluctance to pay an entrance fee.[134] However, a willingness to cooperate in the sustainability of the gallery also existed, as 420 catalogues and twenty-seven season tickets were sold during those five days. The following week offered similar numbers, with the visitors reaching a total of 3,135, of whom nearly 2,000 came on Sunday, and 1,001 on Saturday (which had a reduced entrance fee). Inspired by these results, CBS suggested reducing the price of admission every night in the week after 6pm and printing a popular edition of the catalogue.[135] The statistics issued one month after the opening prove that the strategy was successful, as the admissions had risen to 3,990, of which 1,629

[133] Op. cit. note 7, p.76-77.
[134] LCM 20-10-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.79.
[135] LCM 27-10-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.82.

were by payment. By that time around 22,000 people had visited the gallery (nearly 10% of the city's population at the time).[136] The last data collected nears a total of 75,000 visitors and £400 collected since the opening, with an average of 1,000 visitors daily on the last fortnight (2 to 18 January 1905), when the exhibition was made free. These impressive figures confirm that the gallery was becoming exceedingly popular, although the citizens were not happy to pay for an entrance ticket, a challenge to which the Laing Committee would be subjected on numerous occasions during the following years, when the dilemma between keeping the gallery populated or economically sustainable led to both policies running on an alternating cycle. Further economic support from the Council would have greatly facilitated the resolution of the problem, but, instead, budgetary restrictions continued over the years.

After the inaugural exhibition

CBS' illness and his absence from the Laing after the opening resulted in a blank period without exhibitions, thus evidencing the extent to which the gallery management depended on the curator. Immediately after his return to office in November 1904, CBS was required to produce an action plan relating to future exhibitions, which he designed according to his two ever-present (and often opposed) goals: avoiding expenses and promoting art education. To reduce expenses, CBS proposed trying to retain loans, whilst also 'inviting artists to contribute specially selected works. Such a collection will not require to be covered by insurance, and the cost is therefore comparatively small.'[137] Agreements with the artists would ensure that the artworks stayed in the gallery for at least three months. CBS was obviously aware that living artists needed suitable spaces to show their work, something that benefited the Laing in two ways: it kept the walls full whilst ensuring benefits through the commission obtained from the sale of those pictures. Once again, the lack of resources was pushing the Laing to act as a private gallery, reproducing a situation already commonly experienced by earlier Victorian galleries, many of whose collections

[136] LCM 24-11-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.89.
[137] LCM 15-12-1904. TWA, MD/NC/129/1, p.92.

derived from the sale of exhibited works.[138] Regarding the educational aim, CBS based the success of the gallery upon the recognition of two obligations: that of 'making the aims and higher principles of Art more generally understood' and that of 'cultivating the taste of the rising generation.'[139]

This action plan was supported by an exhibition calendar scheduling four seasonal loan exhibitions per annum (fig.9), something that was against the Committee's initial idea of having a single temporary exhibition for two months every year and then showing the permanent collection the rest of the time, an idea that was obviously not feasible because there was no permanent collection to show. Years later, and even after such a collection had been established, the pattern of four loan exhibitions a year remained, probably because of its effectiveness in attracting visitors and maintaining public curiosity. This is still essentially the exhibition policy used by the Laing nowadays. CBS defended the usefulness of loan exhibitions as 'the next most important means of stimulating an interest in art, and of raising the standards of public taste' after the permanent collections and asserted that 'to widen the field of art education and to maintain the interest of the gallery, it is desirable to hold temporary exhibitions which illustrate some special phase of art, or some particular school of painting, not included in the permanent collections.'[140]

Nevertheless, CBS' absence during the autumn of 1904 meant that the gallery was too late to start applying the proposed calendar in 1905. Apparently, not much was on display between the closure of the inaugural exhibition and March 1905, except for a few remaining loans belonging to the Committee members, a series of electrotyped copies of historical medals that had been the first gift of the Trustees of the British Museum to the Laing, and the arms and armour collection of the local connoisseur R.C. Clephen. Despite the lack of exhibits, curious visitors continued to show up at a surprising daily average of 783, probably attracted by the fact that the gallery was free during that period.[141]

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[138] Waterfield, G. (2015). The People's Galleries. Art, Museums and exhibitions in Britain, 1800-1914. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p.178.
[139] LCM 15-12-1904. TWA, MD/NC/129/1, p.91.
[140] Op. cit. note 52, pp.1-9.
[141] LCM 22-2-1905. TWA, MD/NC/129/1, p.109.

SEASON	SUBJECT	COMMENTS
WINTER (January-March)	Main annual exhibition. Suggestions: Pre-Raphaelites, Historical subjects, the Dutch School, the Flemish School, the French School, the Scottish School, the Spanish School, Battle pictures, naval pictures, portraits of celebrities in oil and watercolours, collection of works by Presidents of the R.A., religious subjects.	Planned to have lower costs than the inaugural exhibition because of not entirely filling the gallery.
SPRING (May- July)	Exhibitions of works by North British artists.	Their fusion became the Northern Counties Exhibition shortly after (see pp.246-270).
SUMMER (August-October)	Exhibitions by living or contemporary artists.	
AUTUMN (November-December)	Exhibitions of famous local artists or local views, complemented by exhibitions of watercolours, drawings or engravings when the first were not available. Examples: T.M. Richardson, T.S. Good, H.P. Parker, J.W. Ewbank, F.H. Emerson, Old Masters' drawings, old Newcastle, historical collection of eighteenth and nineteenth century engravings, works by members of the London Sketch Clubs or the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours.	

Fig.9. CBS' proposal of loan exhibitions' calendar for the Laing. TWA MD/NC/129/1

Then, almost as if to compensate for this period, a quick succession of exhibitions took place, up to a total of six in 1905, the most popular (with over 30,000 visitors) featuring the work of the recently deceased G.F. Watts (1817-1904).[142] The Watts exhibition also marked two milestones in the history of the Laing: firstly, it inaugurated the gallery's presence in a countrywide circuit of loan exhibitions, as the paintings were borrowed by the Manchester Art Gallery from the RA, and then sent to Newcastle after the closure of the Manchester exhibition, thus suggesting CBS' contacts with members of both institutions. And secondly, for the first time, the Laing obtained one of the loans in exchange for another. The work exchanged, which was lent to the Salford Corporation, was none other than Henry Dawson's (1811-1878) *Mansfield Forest, noon* (n.d.) given to Alexander Laing by his friend Arthur Sanderson the previous year, and which still constituted almost the entirety of the permanent collection of the Laing.[143]

On the negative side, the frenzied rhythm of 1905 again brought consequences for CBS' mental health, and the sixth loan exhibition in the year - displaying decorative art for churches by the Clergy and Artists Association - had to be curated by Mr. Maltby whilst CBS recovered at a treatment house. Nevertheless, the year had very positive results, with a total of 267,104 visitors and £932.15.9 profits collected since the opening.[144]

Beyond exhibitions

After setting the exhibition calendar, CBS' work focused on further ways to attract visitors and increase the Laing's presence in Newcastle's cultural life. He asserted that 'the modern art gallery has to prepare special publications in connection with its collections and exhibitions, to organize lectures, gallery talks, film displays, and concerts, and to offer such facilities as a school museum service, an information service, and assistance with regard to research.'[145] The Watts' exhibition had been complemented by a successful

[142] LCM 5-10-1905. TWA, MD/NC/129/1, p.131.
[143] LCM 25-7-1905. TWA, MD/NC/129/1, p.124.
[144] LCM 8-12-1905. TWA, MD/NC/129/1, p.142.
[145] Op. cit. note 52, p.1.

lecture by Sir Whitworth Wallis, so it was decided that similar talks would accompany each important exhibition. These were sometimes offered by CBS and sometimes given by external lecturers, and they became so popular that the curator often repeated them outside the gallery, in clubs, art societies and guilds.[146]

Subscribing to the power of visual education, the Laing worked to create a bond with schools. In 1906, a scheme for organized visits by children was arranged with the Director of Education in Newcastle. Besides these, the gallery encouraged creativity by holding exhibitions of the drawings made at elementary schools, in the belief that they helped children to 'acquire a critical attitude towards their own achievements', and to train their 'hands, eyes and minds'.[147] On the same line, very popular school art competitions were organized, sometimes managing to gather over 500 students from fifty-three schools to make copies of objects in the collections, the best examples of which were later exhibited at the Laing. Moreover, the gallery created a schools' museum service to lend pictures or reproductions to schools, which were complemented by B.B.C. radio talks addressed to children.

The sum of these activities, together with the expectation created by the succession of temporary exhibitions, succeeded in growing the interest of Newcastle population in their gallery, leading to the reception of donations, which in turn became the main supply of works for the permanent collection. On the occasion of the gallery's jubilee, the programme of activities was felt to be 'part of the established cultural life of the city. The gallery has indeed become part of Newcastle's rich heritage.'[148]

Conclusion

Section A has aimed to offer a better understanding of the figure of CBS from a professional and personal point of view, by analysing the elements that allowed him to successfully develop his profession and to achieve his vital goal of

[146] For a detailed list of the main external talks, see: Stevenson, C.B. (1954). 'The work of the Laing Art Gallery and Museum during the last fifty years', TWA, T.132/62.
[147] Op. cit. note 52, p.5.
[148] Stevenson, C.M. (1963). 'The Laing Gallery and Museum, Newcastle', p.3. MSA.

endowing the Laing with a collection. It has also told the story of the struggle for social ascent of a man and his family, achieved through the ability to perform efficiently in the then developing museum sector. Indeed, CBS not only succeeded as a curator, but he also managed to improve the status of his family: all of his nine surviving children received a higher education**,** two of them were Art Gallery Directors (Trevor, in Southport, and Collingwood in Newcastle), two became artists (Verna and Evelin) and three (Muriel, Rowena and Shirley) were connected to education by teaching or running schools.[149] At a more general level, the long duration of CBS' career has allowed observations on the evolution of the museum scene in Britain throughout the first half of the twentieth century, thus transcending the biographical narrative to offer an overview of the development of the profession applicable to other curators of the same period.

Section B has focused on the creation of the Laing's management routines, the first decisions regarding its financing, the organization of its exhibitions, the development of its activities and the establishment of the connections with educational institutions, other art galleries, private companies and collectors, evidencing how in a short time the gallery managed to become a key element of the cultural environment of Newcastle, leading the visual education of the population, despite the limited assistance provided by the city council. In this sense the complex relationship of interdependence and deference initially established with the Public Library, and the difficult role of the members of the Committee belonging to the Council, who had to deal with defending the Laing and its expenses before the other councillors, has been highlighted. As the following chapter evidences, the creation of this reliable and stable operating system, able to inspire confidence and to connect citizens with their gallery, was essential to the encouragement of involvement and donations for the permanent collection.

[149] Author's informal talk with Michael Stevenson, 21-02-2018.

CHAPTER 4. THE ARTWORKS

> I suppose the full story of how many of the pictures were obtained for the gallery will never be told.[1]

Having analysed the circumstances surrounding the creation of the Laing's permanent collection - such as its geographical and historical context, and the people in charge of the gallery - this chapter focuses on the collection itself. It analyses the Laing's acquisition policy, the reasons why it was adopted, and the criteria followed and mechanisms used to pursue it on a low budget, highlighting how financial struggle conditioned the selection of artworks to purchase and the strategies to adopt, and promoted an active search for donations. It also describes how these donations further strengthened the British and North-Eastern components of the collection and embedded it within the local culture, whilst promoting the engagement with donors and living artists. Within this context, the scope and reach of the gallery's two main purchasing funds are discussed, whilst highlighting the impact of their rules on the Laing's purchasing and exhibiting policies, especially in connection with the bias towards watercolours (conditioned by the Wigham Richardson Fund) and local art (owed to the William Glover Fund). The last part of the chapter uses some of the most remarkable artworks acquired before 1957 as case studies of the Laing acquisition techniques, thus illustrating the success of the policies applied.

A. THE POLICY

CBS enjoyed highlighting how the Laing opened without an initial nucleus collection:

> I would like you to cast your minds back to 1904 when I first took over my duties. I was a complete stranger to the North when I came to Newcastle

[1] Spencer, J.R. (1937). *The Northern Pageant*. Newcastle: Newcastle Chronicle, p.192.

> in that year, and you can imagine the shock I received when I was told that Mr. Laing had given a building - that it did not possess a single work of art. This gallery seemed to suggest that Newcastle's optimism was somewhat phenomenal. A gallery as you know is usually built for an already existing collection (…).[2]

The curator used to accompany this story with graphic evidence: a photo of attendant McIntyre sweeping up the wood shavings left by the workers at the completion of the building, as, in CBS' words, 'the shavings were the nearest approach to a work of art that the Corporation possessed for its new Gallery (fig.1).'[3] At some point, he even had the fancy of photographing the shavings as if they were art pieces (fig.2). Apparently, CBS continued repeating the same anecdote over the years, as in 1929, a newspaper article praising the Laing collection repurposed the story into a news headline: 'From Shavings to an Art Collection'.[4] The joke became so popular in Newcastle that, even today, history groups believe that actual wood shavings were displayed on the opening day.[5] However, the fact that in the McIntyre photo the walls were covered in a hessian-like material (whereas photos of the Laing's Inaugural Exhibition show walls with vertical wooden planking), prove that the photo of the wood-shavings was staged at a later moment: whilst this detail reveals much about CBS' personality, it does not detract from his efforts to build from scratch a valuable art collection.

The importance of a policy

The busy curator never fully wrote up a full theoretical treatment of the acquisition principles and policy which however he faithfully followed throughout his career. His only brief text on this subject - the 1915 policy, drafted at the behest of the Laing Committee - seems more of an account of his achievements than the future-focused series of measures to follow that should form the core of a policy. Fortunately,

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[2] Stevenson, C.B. (n.d.) Handwritten draft of talk. MSA.
[3] Stevenson, C.B. (n.d.) Handwritten notes below photograph of attendant McIntyre. TWA, TWCMS_2015_2726.
[4] Anon (29-04-1929). 'From shavings to an art collection'. *Daily Journal,* n.p.
[5] See, for instance: *Friends of Jesmond Old Cemetery* (12-09-2018). 'Alexander Laing'. http://www.jesmondoldcemetery.co.uk/laing_20.html.

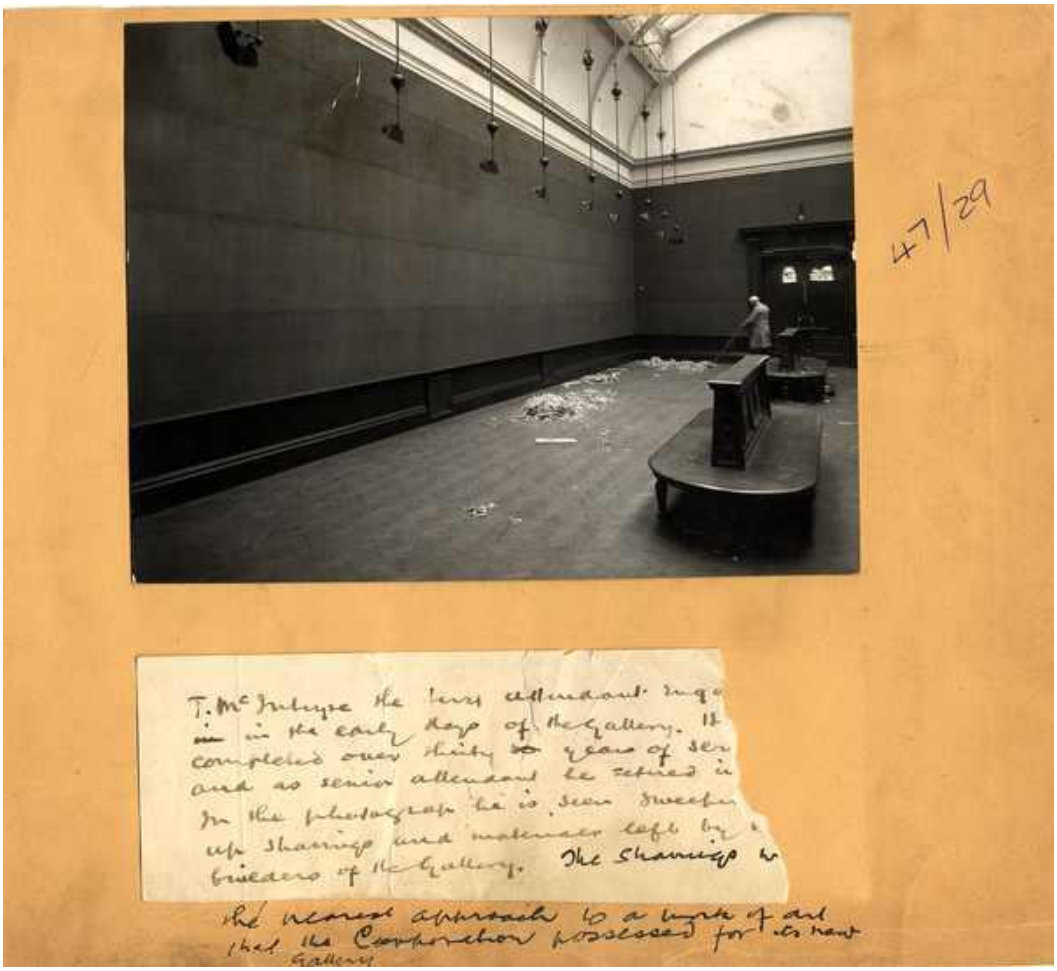

Fig.1. Attendant McIntyre supposedly sweeping up wood shavings. Photograph followed by CBS' handwritten note explaining the anecdote (n.d.). TWA, TWCMS_2015_2726.

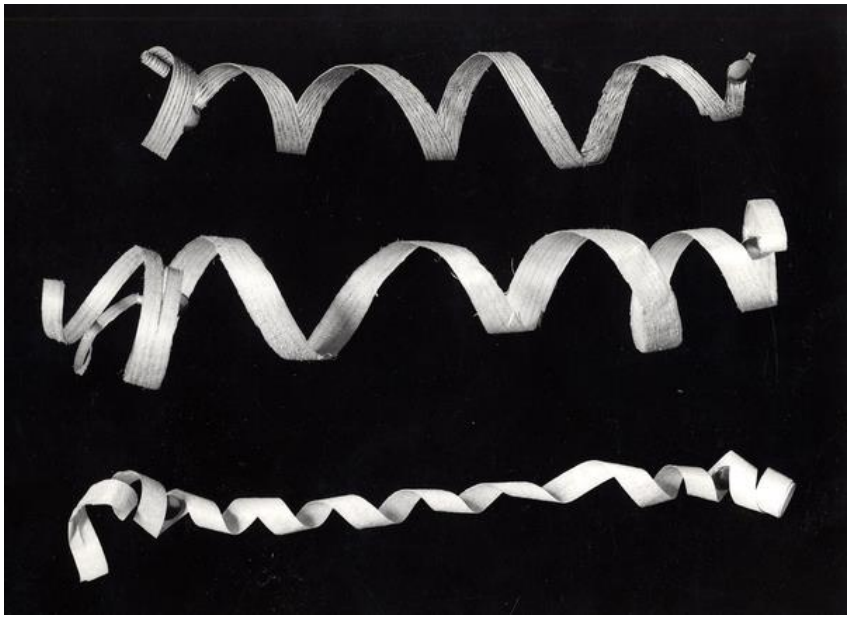
Fig.2. The wood shavings supposedly left by the builders at completion of the Laing. TWA, TWCMS_2015_2727.

Collingwood Stevenson chose this topic for his MA thesis in 1955, entitled 'A policy for a provincial gallery'. This appears to describe an ideal Laing, at a time when the enlargement of the gallery and the construction of the Joicey Museum seemed about to materialize. Like his father, Collingwood advocated for regional galleries to build permanent collections, for different reasons:

> Firstly, there are not sufficient suitable loan exhibitions available. Secondly, the curator and his staff would soon become exhausted by such a rigorous and exacting process. Thirdly, it would be a very costly procedure, and very wasteful, because at the end of it there would be nothing concrete to show for all the money which had been expended. Fourthly, no true appreciation can be built up on such a shifting foundation. [6]

Despite highlighting the Laing's will to engage audiences, Collingwood was aware of regional galleries' financial limitations, implying that collections were often not based on the works that would be desirable to have, but on those that were obtainable. In this sense, he summarised what may have been the objective pursued by the early Laing, stating that 'most provincial art galleries should limit to the purchase of British artists. This policy may have to be further limited to some particular phase, period, style or locality, depending on the finances available.'[7] This hierarchical conception of regional galleries - which perceived non-national institutions as 'second-rate' and therefore unable to achieve foreign masters - had arisen after the birth of the first provincial galleries in Victorian times, but reappeared during the war and early post-war years.[8] Following this same trend, Collingwood believed that a collection of oil paintings by British Old Masters would be too expensive for regional galleries. The same opinion had previously voiced by his father: 'it would be very difficult for the city to acquire pictures by masters of the early British school (Reynolds, Gainsborough, Romney, Raeburn, Constable, Turner) or by masters of foreign schools (Rembrandt) due to their prohibitive prices.'[9]

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[6] Stevenson, C.M. (1955) *A policy for a provincial gallery*. (Thesis for the Diploma of the Museums Association, U.K.), p.35. MSA.
[7] Ibid, p.38.
[8] See, for instance: Rothenstein, J. (1939). 'Towards a Policy for Art Galleries'. *The Connoisseur Magazine*, Vol.CIV, p.208; Cox, T. (1945). *The Development of Collections*. London: Museums Association, p.6.
[9] Stevenson, C.B. (c.1947). Draft of the report for the Joicey Bequest. TWA T132-62

Nevertheless, Collingwood believed that a collection including only modern artists would also be unsatisfactory, for several reasons: firstly, it would not be didactic, because the public would not be shown the earlier phases that were necessary to fully understand later artistic developments.[10] Secondly, he thought that modern art was not attractive to wider audiences. And last, he feared the risk of buying works by living artists, as 'artists rise and fall in the succeeding generations.'[11]

Feasibly, Collingwood's reluctance to purchase modern art was also partly linked to the fact that the Arts Council's touring exhibitions to local authority art galleries during the period - arranged after the introduction of a comprehensive loan system under the National Gallery and Tate Gallery Act 1954 - were quite effectively covering this gap.[12]Therefore, there was a shift from the early Laing's policy, which had shown a clear bias towards the purchase of modern art, despite CBS' awareness of the division of opinions on this subject, which he connected with 'different perceptions of beauty and taste.'[13] Nevertheless, and independently from the period or style chosen, both father and son agreed on quality being the definitive factor guiding purchases: as CBS declared, despite the constraints of a reduced budget, 'mediocre collections damage the reputation of galleries and the cause of art'.[14]

Collingwood (and the Laing policy, by extension) considered foreign art an unsuitable aim for a provincial art gallery, because of it being not only expensive, but also too wide a subject for the small space available, thus leading to incomplete sections producing the effect of 'a store-type of gallery, with a bit of everything, hopelessly jumbled together, so that nothing stands out clearly and distinctly.'[15] For long-term loans (like the ones from the Arts Council) Collingwood preferred those

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[10] The chronological arrangement of exhibitions was a constant in CBS' curatorial work, which in turn emulated the trends applied in nineteenth-century exhibitions of Old Masters. For the origins of this kind of curatorial arrangement, see: Haskell, F. (2000). *The Ephemeral Museum*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

[11] Op. cit. note 6, p.38.

[12] Summerfield, A. (2007). *Interventions: Twentieth-century art collection schemes and their impact on local authority art gallery and museum collections of twentieth century British art in Britain* (Doctoral thesis, UCL, London, U.K.), vol.1, p.79. Retrieved from https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/17420/

[13] Stevenson, C.B. (n.d.) Handwritten draft for talk about modern art. MSA.

[14] Op. cit. note 6, p.31.

[15] Op. cit. note 6, p.42.

that could complete the gaps of permanent collections, so in continuation of the previous point, he discouraged loans of foreign art. For the ground floor museum section, he also defended a limited and unified scheme aimed to allow a better understanding for non-specialist audiences. He thought that the mixture of different objects would 'create an impression of muddle and confusion. It is better to restrict the field of operation to a few distinct and well-defined groups, which can be made reasonably complete.'[16] Like his father, he defended the need to display 'good examples of the particular art or industry with which the region is associated', although this desire for providing an 'industrial' benefit may also be related to the ties of the Laing Committee members to North-Eastern industries.[17]

The impact of the inaugural exhibition (1904) and the first written policy (1915)

As described on chapter 3, CBS' arrangements for the Laing's inaugural exhibition were conditioned by the Gallery's imminent opening. Considering the loans that he would manage to gather in the short time available, the curator opted to organise a chronological survey of the history of British painting, with examples from William Hogarth (1697-1764), as founder of the British school, to Frederic Leighton (1830-1896), complemented with Northern artists such as C. Napier Hemy, John Charlton and Niels M. Lund, engravings relating to Newcastle and North British celebrities, and a few oils by foreign artists. For the Museum section, he arranged objects of industrial art in different categories, such as sculpture, textiles, furniture, pottery, glass, jewellery and ornamental iron work.[18] Because of the success of this exhibition, CBS' closing report suggested building a permanent collection on these same lines: British Art for the gallery section, and industrial art for the museum.[19] Surprisingly, such a vital goal was not further discussed until 1915, when CBS was asked to prepare a report outlining the policy adopted hitherto.[20] This evidences that up to that moment the important decisions regarding the creation of the collection had been based on an unwritten pact. Two options arise in this matter: either the

[16] Op. cit. note 6, p.42.
[17] Op. cit. note 6, p.46.
[18] LCM 04-07-1904. TWA, MD/NC/129/1, p.25.
[19] Stevenson, C.B. (c.1954) 'Laing Art Gallery and Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne', p.1. TWA, T132/62.
[20] LCM 26-02-1915. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.85.

policy had been orally transmitted to all the changing Committee members, or the selection of the first works had tacitly been left in CBS' hands.

Either way, the 1915 'book of instructions' started by highlighting the achievements of the period 1904-1915, stating that the Laing already contained artworks valued at around £35,000, obtained mostly through private donations. A list of almost one hundred donors followed, including personalities like the Duke of Northumberland, Lord Ridley and Lord Joicey. After this introduction, the report pointed to the need for 'historical as well as aesthetic comprehensiveness', arguing that the Laing had been following 'a clearly defined policy' based on the lines of the Inaugural Exhibition, in the belief that a 'general survey of British Art would enable the student and the art lover to trace the gradual development and evolution of British Painting, its aims, method, and treatment', thus connecting the selection criteria with the gallery's educational goal.[21]

The report also described the curation of the painting galleries: Gallery A illustrated early British art, with paintings by W. Bell Scott (1811-1890), Sir A.W. Callcott (1779-1844), Vicat Cole (1833-1893), T.S. Cooper (1803-1902), Henry Dawson (1811–1878), Erskine Nicol (1825-1904), James Peel (1811-1906), T.M. Richardson Snr. (1784–1848) and David Roberts (1796-1864). The potential goal for this section was 'filling the gaps' with pictures by Gainsborough, Reynolds, Constable, Romney or Raeburn. This (certainly unachievable) idea of completing the collection was not only a constant in CBS' career, but a common concern amongst regional galleries, which had copied it from national collections.[22] The Laing's chronological overview continued in Gallery C, which displayed works from the Pre-Raphaelite period onwards, and mainly included paintings by living artists, such as Frank Brangwyn (1867-1956), George Clausen (1852-1944), T.C. Gotch, C. Napier Hemy (1841-1917), Harold Knight (1874-1961), J. Seymour Lucas (1849-1923), Niels M. Lund (1863-1916), Clara Montalba (1842-1929) or J.W. Waterhouse (1849-1917). CBS' predilection for modern art is suggested by his references to Clausen's connection with the Barbizon School and to the Impressionist features in the work of Tom

[21] Stevenson, C.B. (1915). 'The Policy of the Committee with regard to the formation of a permanent collection'. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.95.
[22] Op. cit. note 12, vol.1, p.18.

Mostyn (1864-1930) and Buxton Knight (1842/1843-1908), which evidenced his awareness of the latest London exhibitions, such as the Durand-Ruel's display of Impressionist painting (1905) or Roger Fry's historic 'Manet and the Post-impressionists' (1910) exhibition. Gallery B was devoted to watercolours, apparently because of a previous (unrecorded) suggestion by the Committee member Percy Corder on 'the formation of a collection starting with Paul Sandby, the father of watercolour painting.'[23] It featured the same chronological curation, which in 1915 included examples by Tom Browne (1870-1910), W.S. Coleman (1829-1904) , W. Cosens-Way (1833-1905), Thomas Girtin (1775-1802), Robert Jobling (1841-1923), Laura Knight, Arthur Tucker (1864-1929), and members of the Richardson family. As in the oil section, already at this early stage there was a preponderance of Northern painting and living artists. The Laing was a sector leader in pursuing local art, which became a trend amongst regional galleries since the economic depression of the late 1920s, in response to the relative affordability of such artworks.[24]

The 1915 policy concluded with goals for the future, such as forming 'an excellent representation of the various phases of the British School of Painting', and acquiring further paintings by local artists like Thomas Bewick (1753-1828), Luke Clennell (1781-1840), Birket Foster (1825-1899), J.H. Mole (1814-1886), George Fennell Robson (1788-1833) or Clarkson Stanfield (1793-1867). Because of being considered 'worthy of inclusion in the great national collections', these artists were awarded preference in the purchasing scheme, thus meaning a further bias towards local art.[25] The preference towards local artists of 'national' status was perhaps partly conditioned by financial parameters, as the report expressed concern about the much-needed funding for purchases, and proposed raising a private fund to augment the annual sum allocated for this matter. Instead, national artists targeted included J.S. Cotman (1782-1842), David Cox (1783-1859), Copley Fielding (1787-1855),

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[23] Op. cit. note 19.

[24] Solomon Kaines Smith (1876-1958), director of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery between 1927-1941, advocated for public art galleries supporting local artists, and Kenneth Clark (1903-1983), Director of the National Gallery between 1934-1945, encouraged provincial galleries 'to collect work of local interest, and not attempt to purchase expensive pictures in fashionable styles, which can be had on loan'. See: Summerfield, A. (2007). *Interventions: Twentieth-century art collection schemes and their impact on local authority art gallery and museum collections of twentieth century British art in Britain*. (Doctoral thesis, UCL, London, U.K.), vol.1, p.65. Retrieved from https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/17420/

[25] Op. cit. note 21.

George John Pinwell (1842-1875), Samuel Prout (1783-1852), J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) and P. De Wint (1784-1849), as well as Pre-Raphaelite watercolours by Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), J.E. Millais (1829-1896), and D.G. Rossetti (1828-1882): a rather ambitious scheme that would have made the Laing collection comparable to those of the country's national galleries. Optimistically (due to the higher prices of sculpture), CBS even hoped to purchase works by Alfred Drury (1856-1944), Sir George Frampton (1860-1928) and Alfred Gilbert (1854-1934), aiming to help audiences 'overcome existing prejudices regarding sculpture.'[26] Actually, by 1915 this section was the poorest served in the collection, as so far the Laing had only managed to purchase, in that same year, *The Spirit of Contemplation* (1901), by Albert Toft (1862-1949). This weakness was especially noticeable, as the Laing was one of the few provincial art galleries provided with a purpose-built sculpture hall, like the ones in Belfast Art Gallery, Williamson Art Gallery, in Birkenhead and the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, in Swansea.[27]

Although the 1915 policy was exceedingly brief, lacked indications regarding the museum section, and devoted more space to past achievements than to future goals, it was apparently considered sufficiently clear to form a guide at all levels, for no subsequent attempt was made to revisit the issue. Probably, as in most management matters, the Laing Committee relied heavily upon CBS' personal criteria. Nevertheless, the policy's continued application proved to be successful in different periods, and not even CBS' death brought significant alterations, as Collingwood Stevenson's statement evidenced fifty years later:

> that policy, tough sometimes under fire of criticism, has been steadfastly maintained until the present time and the fine collections which have been acquired over the years on a very slender budget testify to the wisdom of limiting the aim to a particular school of painting rather than dissipating the resources over too wide a field.[28]

[26] Ibid.
[27] Op. cit. note 12, vol.1, p.19.
[28] Stevenson, C.M. (1964). 'The Laing Art Gallery and Museum, Newcastle'. Draft for talk about the Laing's Diamond Jubilee. MSA.

Revising the policy (1958)

The Laing Committee seem to have assumed the milestone of CBS' death as a necessary moment to pause and reflect upon the management criteria followed since the opening of the gallery. Indeed, and although Collingwood Stevenson had already been working at the Laing for over two decades, he was subjected to tests and criticisms, whilst many of the hitherto valid management mechanisms were debated and reviewed. This included the acquisition policy. Collingwood's report on the matter advocated for the continuity of his father's policy, in the idea that its consistent fulfilment had been 'one of the reasons for the quality and importance of the permanent collections.[29]

Collingwood's 1958 report compares the intentions established by CBS' 1915 report with the achievements reached forty-three years later. The shift in the judgement of pictorial techniques in both policies is noteworthy: whilst the 1915 report described the oil collection as the main priority, the 1958 report refocused on the success of the Laing's British watercolour collection, which by the time amounted up to a thousand items, and which was described as 'one of the finest in the provinces.'[30] Again, financial issues probably underpinned this change: since the private funds expected never came in sufficient amount, the 1915 purchasing preference shifted towards - the more affordable - watercolours.[31] Indeed, when describing the collection of British oil paintings, the 1958 policy explains that the old masters were too expensive for the budget available, so the Committee adopted the policy of buying paintings by living or recently deceased painters. Nevertheless, Collingwood described the Laing's Old Master oil collection as 'reasonably good, and constantly being added to in order to fill up gaps', although he highlighted the need to undertake the last step of the original policy: acquiring examples of British old masters, on the grounds that the nucleus of such a collection had already been acquired: in 1958, the Laing already owned examples by George Balmer (1805-1846), J.W. Carmichael (1799-1868), Luke Clennell (1781-1840), John Constable (1776-1837), David Cox (1783-1859),

[29] Stevenson, C.M. (1958) 'Report on the revision of the policy.' TWA, T132-61, n.p.
[30] Ibid.
[31] The Laing was not the only Northern art gallery focusing on the purchase of watercolours: the Walker had already shifted its policy towards them by the beginning of the twentieth century, when its purchasing fund declined. See: Morris, E. and Stevens, T. (2013). The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1873-2000. Bristol: Sanson & Co., p.58.

Henry Dawson (1811-1878), W. Holman Hunt (1827-1910), John Martin (1789-1854) and Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792).

Perhaps out of habit, the Laing Committee approved Collingwood's conservative goal, which considered the 1915 policy as still relevant and viable, thus working against the contemporary countrywide recommendations for regional galleries of the Gulbenkian Report (1959) and the Bow Group Report (1959), which advocated for the purchase of modern and local art respectively.[32] The Committee's only objection against the 1958 policy dealt with the improvement of the museum section, so it was finally decided that the Bond Bequest (1956) would be used to acquire period furniture, pottery and porcelain, whilst the rest of the annual purchasing fund would be devoted to painting.

Regarding future goals, Collingwood suggested that, once a representative collection of British paintings was created, the Laing should start investing in modern French painting, a preference for which no explanation is given and that contrasts vividly with the opposition against foreign art stated in his thesis only three years earlier (see pp.172-176). Regarding the purchasing fund of £10,000 accumulated over the years, the curator proposed devoting it to the improvement of the Laing's weakest section: eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British painting, by adding two or three examples by Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), William Hogarth (1697-1764), Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), Henry Raeburn (1756-1823), J.M.W. Turner or Johan Zoffany (1733-1810), and in this way 'build up the oil section to a strength comparable to the watercolours.'[33]. After this aim had been achieved, the annual grant of £1,250 could be devoted every year to buying three modern paintings every year by artists like Francis Bacon (1909-1992), Charles Ginner (1878-1952), Spencer Gore (1878-1914), Ivon Hitchens (1893-1979), Paul Nash (1889-1946), Lucien Pissarro (1863-1944), Walter Richard Sickert (1860-1942) or Wilson Steer (1860-1942). Collectively, such targets in the acquisition of contemporary art were not especially groundbreaking at the time, but represented established artists, thus indicating a gap-filling approach to collecting: both the Walker and the Leeds Art

[32] Op. cit. note 12, vol.2., p.8.
[33] LCM 22-03-1958. TWA, MD.NC/129/7, p.134.

Gallery had been purchasing examples by Sickert since the 1930s, whilst the V&A Purchase Grant Fund awarded several artworks by twentieth-century artists, including Hitchens and Bacon, to twenty-three provincial art galleries in 1959.[34]

Therefore, Collingwood's proposal stuck to the principles of the 1915 policy of 'filling the gaps' in the art historical record, whilst the attitude towards the purchase of contemporary art was arguably less adventurous than in the Laing's early years. Although the application of the 1958 policy and the range of its success are beyond the timeframe covered in this research, questions usefully raised here include the feasibility of the proposal regarding old masters, given the art market prices of the late 1950s, and also its consonance with the spirit of the period, as it is debatable to what extent an early twentieth-century policy continued to be valid fifty-four years later.

B. PURCHASING ARTWORKS WITH A SMALL BUDGET

Between 1904 and 1957, the Laing went from being an empty building to owning a collection of nearly 14,000 items.[35] Faithful to its dual original denomination as an art gallery and museum, over a third of those acquisitions were archaeological, craft and industrial objects, whilst the rest were examples of the visual arts, including over 6,000 prints - of which more than 4,500 belong to the Mackey Collection, bought as a whole in 1919 due to its affordable price and its potential educational and documentary uses, as substitutes of photographs (see pp.91-93). The remaining artworks acquired included 1,655 watercolours, 760 paintings in oil, and 57 pieces of sculpture (fig.3).

These numbers mean that a significant percentage of the Laing's current collection - which in 2019 numbers over 1,000 oils and over 3,000 watercolours, plus around

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[34] See: Baeza Ruiz, A. (2017). *The Road to Renewal: Refiguring the Art Museum in Twentieth-Century Britain.* (Doctoral Thesis, University of Leeds, Leeds, U.K.). Retrieved from http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/18708; and Anon (1960) 'Recent Acquisitions Survey: Paintings, Sculptures and Drawings of the Twentieth Century Acquired by British Galleries, Between October 1959 and September 1960', *Museums Journal*, Vol.60, pp.234-237.

[35] TWAM stock catalogue. Laing Art Gallery Archive.

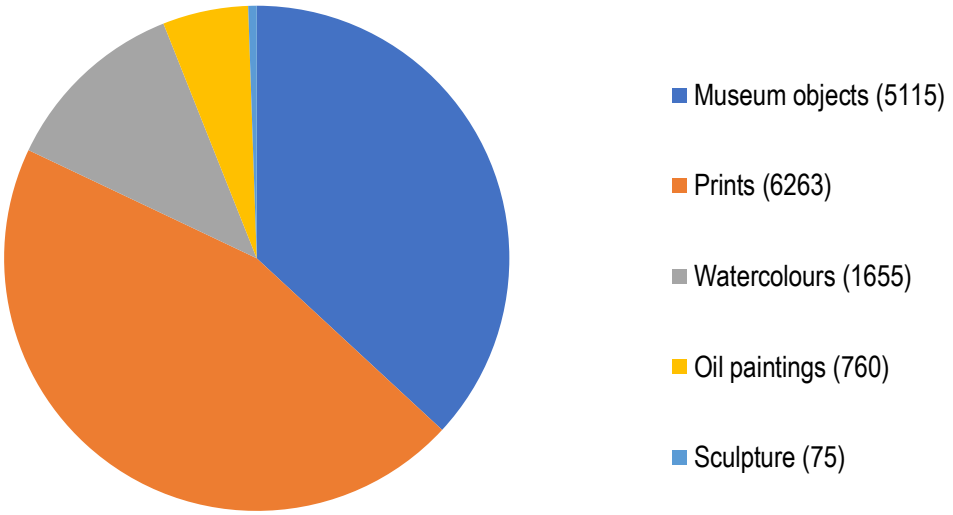

Fig.3. Composition of the Laing collection in 1957

100 pieces of sculpture, about 200 pieces of world art, a small collection of archaeological material and over 5,000 pieces of decorative art – were obtained during CBS' period.[36] Nevertheless, during those years - subtracting the Mackey collection - the Laing purchased only 1,504 pieces, which accounts for barely 15% of the total acquisitions during that period (fig.4).

The Council's annual fund for purchases

The low percentage of purchases in comparison to gifts was - again - underpinned by financial reasons. In CBS' words,

> The amount of money available for purchasing works of art has never been large, but following a definite policy and using the funds to the best advantage it has been possible to build up collections which are of national importance. The purchases of the corporation have, of course, been greatly augmented by the many valuable gifts and bequests which have been secured.[37]

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Laing had a starting debt of £4,430.10.5 upon the Council, accrued from the maintenance expenses of the years 1904-5 (£1,790.11.6) and 1905-6 (£2,639.18.11). Until the First World War, financial management was focused on reducing it (fig.5).[38] In these first years, the Laing returned part of its annual allowance, a goal achieved by trimming all possible expenses. Purchases were one of the items most likely to be affected by these cuts. Nevertheless, the establishment of a half-penny rate from 1906, and Council approval of a variable additional fund for purchases improved this situation (fig. 6).

The graph in fig. 6 – whose original amounts have been converted to their equivalents in 2018 currency through an inflation calculator, in order to render them feasible for comparison - summarises the ups and downs of the Laing's purchasing fund, illustrating how historic events such as the World Wars or the 1930s

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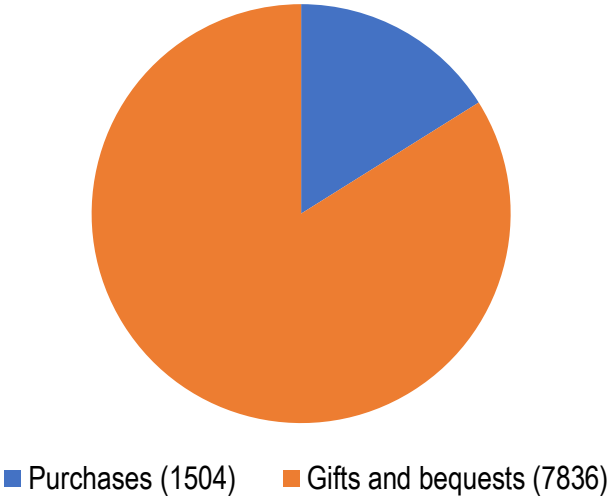
[36] *TWAM*. 'Collections development policy for museums and galleries.' https://twmuseums.org.uk/files/138523-collections-development-policy-for-museums-and-galleries.pdf
[37] Stevenson, C.B. (c.1954) Laing Art Gallery and Museum, Exhibitions. TWA, T132/62, p.1.
[38] TWA, T132/62.

Fig.4. Acquisition methods between 1904-1957



YEAR	MEANS USED TO COLLECT MONEY/ REDUCE THE DEBT	AMOUNT COLLECTED	DEBT AMOUNTING TO:
1904-6	- Admission fees - Sale of catalogues	£957.13.6	£3,472.16.11
1906-7	- Halfpenny rate levied - Underspent balance on year's estimate	£882.12.3	£2,590.4.8
1907-8	Underspent balance on year's estimate	£96.9.6	£2,493.15.2
1908-9	Underspent balance on year's estimate	£466.6.3	£2,027.8.11
1909-10	Underspent balance on year's estimate	£178.3.11	£1,849.5.-
1910-11	Underspent balance on year's estimate	£455.19.-	£1,393.6.-
1911-12	Underspent balance on year's estimate	£604.19.8	£788.6.4
1912-13	Underspent balance on year's estimate	£433	£520.6.4
1913-14	Underspent balance on year's estimate	£196	£324.6.4

Fig. 5. Debt reduction between 1904-1914. Mentions to the debt are absent after 1914, which suggests that the debt was paid off in that year.

Fig. 6. Annual Council budget for purchases between 1904-1957. Original amounts have been converted to their equivalents in 2018 currency.

depression affected the budget available.[39] It also reflects one of the Laing's techniques for quickly purchasing relevant works when opportunities arose, which consisted in borrowing money from the following year's allowance, as happened in 1919 for the purchase of the Mackey Collection and in 1925 for the commission of the lunette decorations.

The analysis of the Laing's unsteady Council purchasing fund proves the indispensable role of private donations and, therefore, the vital importance of establishing contacts that would facilitate such gifts (see pp.231-246). The situation did not differ significantly from the strategy followed – on a much bigger scale - by other provincial galleries: when in 1909 CBS enquired about this matter, he found out that, for instance, the Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum's MacDonald Fund provided £700 for purchases every three years, whilst Hull Art Gallery had an annual donation of £1,000, and the Harris Free Library and Museum (Preston) counted on the Harris Bequest Fund, which in 1908 amounted to £1,875.[40] Of the twenty-two regional galleries contacted, only the Atkinson Art Gallery (Southport) and the Blackburn Free Library, Museum and Art Gallery depended exclusively on Council funds for purchases. Indeed, most Edwardian British regional galleries had needed private donors both for their creation and endowment: a gallery as significant as Birmingham did not even have a purchase allowance, whilst at the opening ceremony of the Towneley Hall Art Gallery and Museum (Burnley), the Mayor had stated that rates were not applicable to the purchase of artworks.[41] The same problem had arisen in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, where purchases were made out of the income of the Autumn Exhibitions: something that the Laing copied, on a smaller scale, with the Northern Counties Exhibitions (see pp.246-270).[42]

A further element evidencing the limited Council funding for purchases is that the purchase and conservation of museum furniture, frames and exhibition cases were included in the same budget area as the purchase of artworks, so only a part of this

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[39] Bank of England Inflation Calculator. www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator.
[40] Letters to C.B. Stevenson from regional gallery directors (1909). 'Papers about History of the Laing, 1904-1967.' TWA, T.132/62.
[41] Howarth, E. ed. (1902). 'Burnley Art Gallery'. *Museums Journal,* vol.2, p.358.
[42] Morris, E. and Stevens, T. (2013). *The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1873-2000.* Bristol: Sanson & Co., p.16.

budget item was actually devoted to acquiring art. A breakdown of the budget item for purchases in 1935-36 illustrates the extent of these problems (fig.7).[43]

CBS campaigned against this systematic underfunding, insisting that the collection could not be built exclusively on gifts, and that the creation of a stable and sufficient fund allowing regular purchases was essential for the Laing to function properly. He stated that 'the additions to the permanent collection have maintained the interest of the Gallery in matters of artistic development', and that

> it is necessary to maintain a new flow of purchases in the various sections of the museum and gallery just in the same way that the Library acquires up to date books of reference, etc. The maintenance of the interest of the Gallery has resulted in gifts and bequests of considerable value.[44]

Concerned with the fact that the public purchasing fund was rarely sufficient for buying oil paintings, he wrote several requests to the Council, especially when favorable acquisition opportunities appeared. For instance, in 1955, he mentioned the offer of works by Jack B. Yeats (£2,000), Matthew Smith (£450) and Sickert (£575), besides the Sawley Flagon (£1,250), insisting that 'the addition of works of art gives the gallery prestige and distinction.'[45] The draft of this letter holds the handwritten notes 'Birmingham, £4,900' and 'Leeds, £2,000', which may refer to the annual funding that the galleries of those cities had available for purchases, information that CBS had been requesting around that time.[46] When in 1958 Collingwood Stevenson posed again this question to fellow regional curators, he realised that most Councils had increased the public funding for purchases in their galleries, whilst private external funds and donations reached amounts that the Laing had never received: for instance, the Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery received £8,000 from the Council for purchases, plus funds from the Association of the Friends of the Gallery and from the Public Picture Gallery Fund, whilst the Graves Art Gallery (Sheffield) received an accumulative Council purchasing fund of

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[43] Stevenson, C.B. (1934) Report about the estimates for purchases. TWA T.132/62.
[44] Stevenson, C.B. (n.d.) Item nº9. TWA doc. T132/62.
[45] Of these objects, only the flagon could be purchased, although the fund was not provided by Newcastle Council, but by the NACF. See: Anguix, L. (2020). 'The Festival of Britain at the Laing'. *Friends News. Newsletter for the Friends of the Laing Art Gallery*, vol.132, pp.7-11.
[46] Stevenson, C.B. (28-02-1955). Draft of letter to the City Council TWA T132/62.

TOTAL ESTIMATE FOR PURCHASES 1935-36:					**£591**
Commission of lunette					£200
Fittings	Cases	Greek vases	£25	£160	
		Costumes	£30		
		Children's section	£30		
		Swinburne Lustre	£25		
	Cabinets	Reserve Collections	£30		
		School Collections	£20		
Frames				£20	£180
Budget remaining for purchase of works of art in 1935-36					**£211**

Fig.7.Breakdown of the Laing's purchasing budget item for the year 1935-36. TWA T.132/62.

£2,500 a year, which could be combined with funding from the Graves Trustees, the Maleham Bequest Trustees and the Sheffield Town Trust.[47]

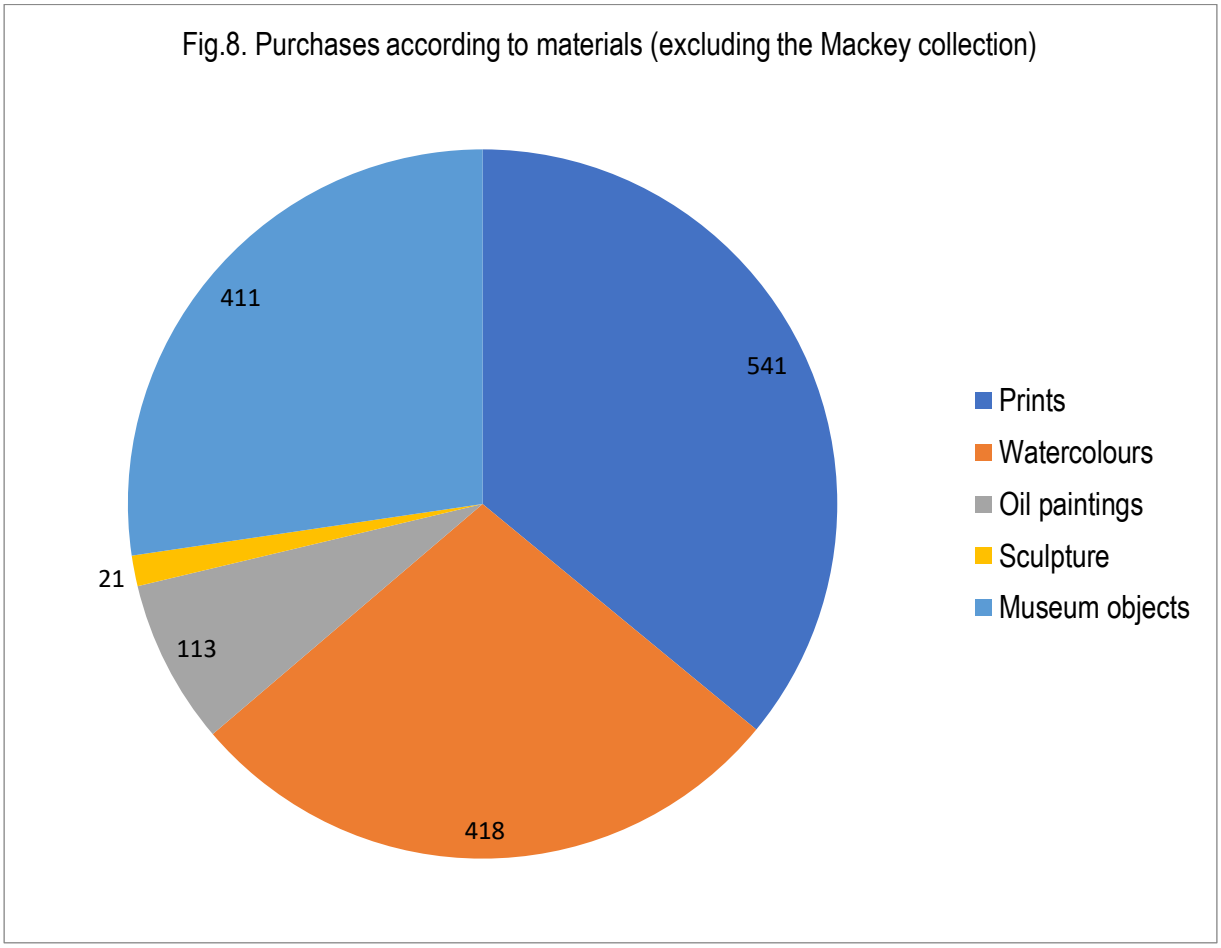
Purchasing criteria and techniques

These funding issues conditioned the Laing's purchasing criteria in different ways. Firstly, they dictated the timings: most of the purchases were made in CBS' last years, when the initial debt had been paid off and the budget had grown slightly. Secondly, they conditioned the kind of artworks to purchase: oil paintings and sculptures could only be bought rarely (fig.8). Thirdly, they forced the development of purchasing strategies, like making 'very wide economy in the hope of accumulating the fund to obtain sufficient to enable them to acquire from time to time one or two works of outstanding importance.'[48] Also, most of the watercolours were not purchased using the Council annual purchasing fund, but from the Wigham Richardson Fund (see pp.233-239), and similarly, most of the artworks by living local artists were acquired through the John Glover Fund (see pp.239-246). Complementary means such as gifts or long-term loans were used to obtain more important artworks. Last but not least, the aim to get as many artworks of the best quality for the least cost underpinned most of the Laing's purchasing choices, such as the focus on British art and living artists, the preference for artworks on paper (prints, drawings and watercolours) and the promotion of local art. Interestingly, these financially-based choices ended up influencing the aesthetic education of its audiences, becoming key, for example, in the rediscovery of local art, in what the press praised as a way of 'introducing to the North-country its own famous artists, previously known to the average citizen by their name rather than by their work.'[49]

Another technique applied to lower the prices was buying directly from artists and private collectors, thus avoiding the payment of dealers' commissions, whilst having the opportunity to negotiate with artists directly, in the awareness that they would

[47] Stevenson, C.M. (1958) 'Curator's Report: Purchase of Works of art.' TWA T123-61, n.p.
[48] Stevenson, C.B. (n.d.) 'Item nº9.' TWA, T132/62.
[49] Anon. (17-01-1918). 'North-Country Artist'. *North Mail,* n.p.

Fig.8. Purchases according to materials (excluding the Mackey collection)



accept lower prices in exchange for the prestige of being exhibited at a public art gallery. Also frequently, the artworks were purchased while being on display at the Laing, thus allowing the Committee to see the works under consideration and facilitating savings in shipping, as Newcastle's peripheral condition in relation to the national art market was a further handicap.

Keeping in touch with the national arts scene

Indeed, Newcastle's peripheral location in relation to London (understood as the core of the British art scene) restricted not only purchases, but also donations and loan exhibitions, besides impacting upon the curatorial choices and access to networks of artists, museum directors and collectors.[50] To solve this isolation, CBS arranged annual expeditions to the capital with the Committee Chairman and Vice-Chairman, as 'a valuable means of keeping in touch with the developments of the National Collections, seeing artists and owners, museums, and obtaining information of considerable assistance in connection with art gallery and museum administration.'[51]

These trips followed a systematic pattern, always starting with a visit to the private view of the summer exhibition of the RA, where they met artists and curators of regional galleries. The fact that several Laing Committee members regularly attended these private openings at their own expense indicates the importance of these events, both artistically (as the place to see the latest trends) and as a social gathering (as the place to be seen and meet others in the art world). In other words, 'people do not come to the Summer Exhibition only to buy […]. The event, right from its beginnings, has been an opportunity for self-display and self-fashioning, and for the careful calibration of class identity.'[52] Besides its social relevance, the Summer Exhibition at Burlington House was the place of reference for provincial museums regarding what to buy. As the critic George Moore bitterly described,

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[50] For further analysis of the London art market in Edwardian times, see: Fletcher, P. and Helmreich, A. (2011). *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850-1939.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.
[51] LCM 28-05-1920. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.280.
[52] Hallett, M. and Turner, S.V. (2018). *The Great Spectacle. 250 years of the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition*. London: Royal Academy of Arts, p. 22.

> Art in the provinces is little more than a reflection of the Academy. Th majority of the pictures represent the taste of men who have no knowledge of art, and who, to disguise their ignorance, follow the advice which the Academy gives to provincial England […].[53]

Nevertheless, the RA's reputation as the backbone of traditionalism and academic painting was already changing in the interwar period - when the Laing representatives started attending its openings regularly – and several modernist artists had already started approaching the institution in search of opportunities for self-promotion that it offered.[54] The Laing was one of the organisations willing to deal with both modernist and academic artists: for instance, in 1922 the painting *A tale by the way* (1922), by the landscapist Harry Watson (1871-1936), was spotted at the private view of the summer exhibition and then purchased by the Laing the following day at the artist's studio in Kensington, where Watson agreed to reduce the price from 250 to 200 guineas. CBS justified this variation from the gallery's usual purchasing methods on the basis that 'for several years it has been the hope of the Committee that an example of his work should be acquired for the gallery.'[55] This transgression seems not to have caused much annoyance to the Laing committee, as it was repeated the following year with *The Watch Tower* (1923), by another landscape-painter, John Arnesby Brown (1866-1955).[56]

Besides commercial transactions, artists were interested in the opportunities that the Laing offered as showcase for their work. For example, in 1923, A.J. Munnings (1878-1959), Harold and Laura Knight, Sir W. Goscombe John (1860-1952), Alfred Drury (1856-1944) and C. Hartwell (1873-1951) arranged loans of their work for the Laing's Exhibition of Modern Paintings.[57] One year later, Gotch and Stanhope Forbes (1857-1947) approached the Laing representatives attending the RA Summer Exhibition with the proposal to arrange 'an exhibition to illustrate the work of the Cornish Brotherhood' (i.e. the Newlyn School), offering help 'in bringing together a thoroughly representative collection'.[58] Actually, the loan of works by living artists

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[53] Moore, G. (1893) *Modern Painting.* Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Walter Scott Ltd.
[54] For a wider discussion regarding modernism at the RA during the interwar period, see Corbett, D.P. (1997). *The Modernity of English Art, 1914-30.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp.192-217.
[55] LCM 26-05-1922. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.366.
[56] LCM 25-05-1923. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.416.
[57] LCM 25-05-1923. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.416.
[58] LCM 30-05-1924. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.458.

provided mutual benefit: for the gallery, it was an affordable way to fill its walls with new material, while artists benefitted from using the Laing as a northern showcase. Since the works of living artists exhibited in the gallery were always for sale, not only might the museum purchase works itself, but private buyers who might not go to private galleries in London could also be reached this way. The Laing further benefited by receiving visitors and by the commissions on such sales.

The private views of the RA were also a useful indicator of the art market. CBS' reports were full of observations on prices: for instance, in 1934, he highlighted a growing interest of the RA in North-country artists, such as James Bateman (1893-1959), whose *The Field Byre* (1933) had been purchased the previous year by the Laing and who in 1934 had already had three artworks purchased by the National Gallery of South Australia, in Adelaide, or Harry E. Allen (1894-1958) - of whom the Laing was the first art gallery to have an artwork - who in 1934 sold a painting to the Gallery of Stoke.[59] The Laing's desire to obtain a collection of Modern paintings at competitive prices can be felt in the curator's speech on the matter: 'this emphasizes the importance of securing pictures by distinguished living artists before their works increase in value to such an extent that it is impossible to consider their purchase.' [60]

The second day of the Laing's members annual visit to London was usually spent applying for loans at public museums such as the South Kensington Museum, the V&A (mainly objects of industrial art obtained through its Board of Education), the Tate, the British Museum, the London Guildhall and the National Gallery. For instance, in 1922, objects connected to the Newcastle local industries were obtained from the V&A, evidencing the ever-didactic purposes of the Laing's ground floor museum section.[61] Similarly, a visit to the London Guildhall in 1928 was employed to obtain works from North-Country artists and local views which were displayed at the Arts Palace of the North-East Coast exhibition in 1929.[62]

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[59] For details of the acquisition of Bateman's *The Harvest* (1933), see: Potter, M.C. (2019). *British Art for Australia, 1860–1953: The Acquisition of Artworks from the United Kingdom by Australian National Galleries.* Abingdon, Oxon, and New York: Routledge, p.166.
[60] LCM 25-05-1934. TWA MD/NC/129/4, p.250.
[61] LCM 26-05-1922. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.366.
[62] LCM 25-05-1928. TWA MD/NC/129/4, p.39.

These loan collections were offered to regional galleries on a first come-first served basis, and CBS complained that, by the time of the year in which they usually visited London, many works 'had already been earmarked for other provincial galleries', thus evidencing how Newcastle's peripheral geographical position had a negative impact on the arrangement of loan exhibitions at the Laing.[63] Bigger galleries like the Walker made two annual visits to London (one around March to select loans from national collections and to choose artworks under creation directly from the artists' studios for their Autumn Exhibition in Liverpool, and a second one in May-June for the opening of the RA Summer Exhibition) but the Laing could not afford this expense.[64] The disadvantageous dependence on artworks kept far away in national collections was highlighted in 1925, when the Laing promoted a joint legal action by provincial galleries requesting a fairer distribution of the 19,000 Turner drawings of the National Gallery.[65] The waters calmed down after a year, when Sir Charles John Holmes (Director of the National Gallery between 1921-1928) offered to lend some watercolours, on the grounds that only 2,000 of the Turner drawings were worth showing, of which 1,200 were already on exhibition and the rest were too fragile.[66] Nevertheless, the protest raised awareness of the need of access to State facilities by provincial museums. The MA supported the idea that hitherto only metropolitan museums had been considered, and a letter from provincial museums asked for the appointment of a Royal Commission to enquire into the matter.[67]

Besides loans, the meetings of the Laing's representatives with directors of the national museums were used to obtain gifts for the gallery and to learn about curatorial techniques. For instance, in 1928 CBS' report mentioned a screen at the Guildhall that could hold 'eight unframed drawings', placed 'in the centre of the galleries', elements that he suggested as ideas to solve the Laing's insufficient exhibition space, especially in connection with the Northern Counties exhibitions.[68]

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[63] LCM 28-02-1930. TWA MD/NC/129/4, p.96.
[64] Op. cit. note 40, p.18.
[65] LCM 27-11-1925. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.546.
[66] LCM 29-01-1926. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.550.
[67] LCM 27-03-1925. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.508.
[68] LCM 25-05-1928. TWA MD/NC/129/4, p.39.

The trip to London also included visits to artists' societies (e.g. Royal Society of British Artists, Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours or Royal Society of Painters in Watercolours) in search of loans or prospective purchases. Occasionally, exhibitions at the Laing were arranged in cooperation with these institutions, like the Centenary Exhibition of the creation of the Royal Society of Painters in Watercolours (1922), a successful show attracting over 35,000 visitors and benefiting the Laing with the commissions from sales.[69] This commission added a further link in the art marketing process, as artists' societies already charged a percentage of about 10% on works sold.[70]

Another frequent aspect of the Laing's trips were the visits to London commercial galleries (e.g. Leicester Galleries, Grafton, Gieves, the New Burlington Galleries, Goupil, Agnews, Walker, Arlington, Redfern, Colnaghi, Paterson, Wertheim, Palser, Tooth & Sons or the Fine Art Society). There, a pre-selection of works to purchase was made, and arrangements agreed for the artworks to be sent to Newcastle, thus allowing their inspection by the Laing Committee or by the trustees of the Wigham Richardson Fund (see pp.233-239). Despite the small amount that the Laing could spend in purchases, such galleries offered preferential conditions like free shipping of the artworks for inspection or loans for exhibitions. Feasibly, this generosity was not only motivated by the expectation of the Laing purchasing the pieces, but mostly by an aim to use the gallery as a valuable Northern showcase. Indeed, the loans sent by London commercial galleries were displayed at the Laing labelled with their sale prices, a situation that angered local merchants: in 1922, the Newcastle & Gateshead Chamber of Commerce complained about the Laing selling pictures sent in for exhibition 'on the ground that the gallery was rate maintained', to which the museum replied that 'the RA, the Royal Societies of Painters and every municipal gallery sold pictures sent to their respective exhibitions by living artists', and that 'it would be impossible for the committee to secure loans of modern works' if they did not follow this procedure.[71] The Laing Committee was accurate in this claim, as the

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[69] Stanton, H. (28-06-1922). Letter to C.B. Stevenson. Published by the *Evening Chronicle* (05-07-1922), n.p.
[70] See: Codell, J. 'Artists' Professional Societies: Production, Consumption and Aesthetics.' In Allen, B., ed. (1995). *Towards a Modern Art World.* London: Yale University Press, pp.169-187.
[71] LCM 29-09-1922. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.381.

practice was widespread amongst regional museums before the Second World War: examples of exhibitions offering works for sale in British public art galleries included the Autumn Exhibition at Aberdeen Art Gallery, the Spring Exhibition at Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, the Spring Exhibition at Atkinson Art Gallery, in Southport and the Spring, Summer and Autumn Exhibitions at Worcester Art Gallery.[72]

The Laing team's decisions on what to buy in London, what to send from London galleries for Committee inspection or public exhibition, and what to hang at the Laing - so that it could be viewed and purchased by private collectors in the North East - may have had a decisive impact on the education of the artistic taste of local audiences, and even on the composition of art collections belonging to private owners who did not interact first-hand with the London art market. Nevertheless, when choosing artworks to be sent from the London commercial galleries to Newcastle, the Laing's aim always remained the same: building the permanent collection, making sure that it was as educational and complete as possible, whilst keeping purchases within the gallery budget. Therefore, even if the kind of pieces selected changed according to the gallery's need, their choice was not guided by financial profitability, but instead followed always the same criteria: educational value, affordable price, and suitability for the Laing collection.

Before the reception of the Wigham Richardson Fund, purchases focused on early English watercolours, chosen because of their more affordable prices compared to oil paintings. For instance, in 1923, examples by Paul Sandby (1731-1809), W. Payne (1776-1830) and S. Prout (1783-1852) were chosen.[73] In 1924, the selection included works by Peter de Wint (1784-1849), David Roberts (1796-1864), Philip James de Loutherbourg (1740-1812) and Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827), besides a conscious preference for North-Country artists like Reginald Smith (1871-1934), and reproductions for art students.[74] The arrival of the Wigham Richardson Fund allowed the Laing Committee to 'fill the gaps in the watercolour collection', which in consequence caused a shift in the kind of paintings to be bought with the

[72] Op. cit. note 11, vol.1, p.64.
[73] LCM 25-05-1923. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.416.
[74] LCM 30-05-1924. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.458.

Council funds: from 1930, modern artworks in oil became the goal. This financial choice was described as 'an opportunity to secure examples by distinguished artists whose work has not yet risen to prohibitive prices'.[75] However, the Laing's London team quickly realised that foreign modern painters like Cezanne, Gauguin, Matisse, Picasso, Modigliani or Utrillo, and even national artists such as Augustus John, Paul Nash and Sickert were 'quite beyond' their purchasing power: as an example, CBS mentioned that a small portrait by Augustus John cost £5,500. His cheapest work was £1250, so that only Duncan Grant's cheapest portrait (£325) would be reachable.[76]

An alternative was found by approaching living British artists directly at their London studios. This was the way in which artworks like *The Fair* (c.1916) by Laura Knight and *Hayfield, Widdington* (1893ca.) by Sir George Clausen (1852-1944) were purchased. In the 1930s, the Laing's London party also visited the studios of the Northeastern artists A.K. Lawrence, J.W. Tucker and J.H. Willis to check the work process of the lunette decorations, as paradoxically, these commissions, intended to promote local art, were instead painted in London by artists who, like the Laing itself, were trying to improve their chances of success by moving to the metropolis to combat the problems of marginalisation on the periphery. Similarly, many Newcastle collectors living in London were approached during these trips, and gifts such as the *Portrait of Sir Charles Algernon Parsons* (c.1905) by Sir William Orpen (1878-1931), or the eighty pieces of the Hugh Wilson Collection of Newcastle views were obtained in this way.[77] The Laing representatives even knocked on the doors of the widows of North Country artists: through Dod Procter (1890–1972), seventy loans for an Ernest Procter (1885-1935) memorial exhibition and the gift of the oil painting *The Family* (1935) were achieved.[78] Similarly, Mrs. Cecil Rea offered two oil paintings and twenty drawings in chalk.[79] The last stop on these trips was usually devoted to connoisseurs, sometimes with the aim of researching paintings from the Laing

[75] LCM 29-05-1931. TWA MD/NC/129/4, p.151.
[76] LCM 28-02-1930. TWA MD/NC/129/4, p.96.
[77] LCM 25-05-1923. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.416.
[78] 'A Special correspondant' (20-04-1936). 'Many examples of Ernest Procter's art on show in Newcastle.' *Yorkshire Post,* n.p.
[79] LCM 28-05-1939. TWA MD/NC/129/5, p.186.

collections, at other times with an intention to obtain loans from those experts. For instance, a fruitful visit was paid to the scholar Sir Edward Howard Marsh (1872-1953), who lent ninety-six paintings for exhibition at the Laing, being left 'with about twenty pictures to cover the walls of his house.'[80]

Reviewing the purchasing methods

As stated, besides London dealers, the favourite purchasing technique during CBS' period was acquiring artworks whilst exhibited at the gallery. This was especially useful for local art, and was the method used for most of the purchases through the Glover Fund (see pp.239-246). Moreover, local owners often offered their works for sale directly to the Laing before contacting anyone else. Possibly, this was due to the Laing having previously fostered a relationship of trust with them through invitations to private views and requests for loans. The purchase from auctions happened only rarely, although occasional anecdotes on this matter illustrate how personally CBS took his crusade to find deals for the Laing:

> After the death of Mr. C. Mitchell (Armstrong Whitworths), the contents of his home, Jesmond Towers, were put up for sale. Mr. Stevenson had a look round before the sale, and he noticed a picture, poorly framed, hanging in a bedroom. He recognized it as a Peter de Wint, and noticed it had a Christie's number on the back. He bought the picture at the sale for £18. Later, Christie's were able to tell him that Mr. Mitchell had bought the picture years before for £175. It was originally in the collection of Mr. Whelldon Barnes, of Durham. The picture is probably worth £300 today.[81]

Although these methods had proven successful for over fifty years, they did not escape the general revision carried out after CBS' death. Collingwood Stevenson was then asked to contact fellow curators of regional galleries and collect information on their purchasing methods.[82] After comparing the answers received from nineteen public galleries around the country, including the Brighton Art Gallery and Museum, the Walker Art Gallery (Liverpool) and the Graves Art Gallery (Sheffield), Collingwood deduced that the common preferred purchasing method was through

[80] LCM 29-05-1931. TWA MD/NC/129/4, p.151.
[81] Op. cit. note 1.
[82] Op. cit. note 47.

London dealers. Most public galleries did not purchase directly from private owners, on the grounds of not being allowed to take the initiative, but having to wait instead for an offer to be made (something that rarely happened, because most collectors preferred to let dealers carry out the transactions). Regarding living artists, the galleries stated that commonly the artists employed a dealer to act for them, whilst purchasing at auction houses was considered unachievable*, e*xcept in cases when the curator was allowed to spend on his own authority.

Less adventurous than his father, Collingwood Stevenson recommended the Laing Committee to purchase from dealers, for several reasons. Firstly, dealers could guarantee the authenticity of the artworks. Secondly, they sent paintings for Committee inspection without obligation to purchase and without cost to the gallery. Thirdly, they restored and framed the paintings. Last, they eased the curator's work, as in one visit to London he could visit many dealers 'and decide quickly if there is anything suitable for the gallery', whilst saving the Committee's time by allowing members to view and buy artworks in Newcastle without having to travel, which also meant savings in travel expenses.[83] The only disadvantage Collingwood mentioned were the dealers' commissions, although he affirmed that most dealers offered a 10% reduction for art galleries. When the Laing Committee suggested requesting further reductions, Collingwood Stevenson contacted Sir Philip Hendy (Director of the National Gallery between 1946-1967), who discouraged the idea, as the demand for artworks far outran the supply, so large reductions meant

> that the object is not what it pretends to be. The better the work of art, the less the dealer is likely to reduce the price. […] The constant practice of trying to beat down the prices, however fair these may be, would only tend to make dealers raise the asking price unnecessarily or offer nothing but second-rate goods.[84]

Actually, Collingwood's conservative attitude was in line with the suggestions of Trenchard Cox (Director of the V&A between 1955-1966), who discouraged provincial galleries to purchase from auctions because of the added administrative

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

difficulties such as the short timings for decision-making or the difficulty for non-expert committees to make a correct appraisal of the artworks.[85]

C. DONATIONS AS AN ACQUISITION METHOD

As previously noted, the early Laing collection relied heavily on gifts. Between 1904 and 1957, a total of 7,836 donations were obtained, against 1,504 purchases (excluding the Mackey collection). This means that nearly 84% of the artworks acquired in this period did not cost Newcastle Council any money. As Alexander Laing had predicted, the gallery, 'by the liberality of the inhabitants [of Newcastle] would soon be supplied with pictures and statuary for the encouragement and development of British Art.'[86] Fifty years later, CBS seemed to agree with Mr. Laing's opinion when stating that 'the present permanent collections have been built up almost entirely by the generosity of the public and mainly through the Exhibitions which have been held.'[87] However, beyond generosity, an essential ingredient for success was CBS' tireless research and selection work, together with his personal mixture of perseverance, negotiation skills, networking, personal charm, and diplomacy. His thoroughness was motivated by his belief that 'the prime responsibility of the art-gallery director lies in the acquisition of really fine objects for his collection, since on these will the gallery eventually be judged.'[88] As a result,

> Newcastle has spent comparatively little on its art gallery for the purchase of masterpieces. Yet today, by gifts and bequests, and the work of the curator, the Gallery's treasures are worth over £150,000. And many of these gifts have been the outcome of the special loan exhibitions arranged by Mr. Stevenson.[89]

Believing that 'one of the unwritten duties of curators is to encourage and persuade patrons to give freely, and of their best', CBS cultivated long-term relations with collectors through frequent requests for loans.[90] These relations often evolved into

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[85] Cox, T. (1956). *Handbook for Museum Curators.* London: Museums Association, pp.23-25.
[86] Laing, A. (17-01-1900). Letter to the city Council. NCR, 1899-1900, p.153.
[87] Stevenson, C.B. (1954). 'The Laing Art Gallery: how it came into existence', p.2. TWA T.132/62.
[88] Cox, T. (1949). *Museums in Modem Life.* London: Royal Society of Arts, p.22.
[89] Op. cit. note 1.
[90] Op. cit. note 6, p.38.

the owner being asked to become a member of the Laing Committee, a position that most collectors held until their deaths. Commonly, artworks were bequeathed to the Laing in an almost accidental way, after the gallery had retained them on loan for so many years that their owners died whilst their collections were on display, thus encouraging descendants or executors to offer the pieces to the gallery where they had been for so long. Examples of acquisitions through this strategy are the *Portrait of the Artist* (1908), by Sir William Orpen (1878-1931), or *Love in Idleness* (1891ca.), by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912), both of which had been on long-term loans before their owners' deaths (see p.274 and p.280). The Laing's museum section was also significantly enriched by gifts from Laing-related collectors, like the Higginbottom Japanese Collection, the Matthew Bell Collection of Local Glass and the Parker Brewis Collection of Arms and Armour.

Engagement with charitable art foundations was another successful collecting strategy. The gallery benefited from the Northern Art Collections Fund (which started in 1926, and gave the first donation of £100 to the Laing in 1927), the National Collections Fund (which the gallery joined in 1929 with a subscription fee of £5.5 p.a.) and the Contemporary Art Society (with which the Laing had been involved since 1927 with a fee of 5 guineas p.a.). Artworks obtained from public funds included *The Hammock* (1921-1923), by Duncan Grant (1885-1978) and *The Breton Shepherdess* (1886), by Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), also discussed in section G.

More complex than seeking donations was the task of rejecting the works not meeting the requirements of the policy. The Committee members became aware of this difficulty just a month before the opening, when the first gift (*Mansfield Forest-noon* (n.d.) by Henry Dawson (1811-1878)) arrived. Coming from Mr. Laing's Scottish friend, Arthur Sanderson, it was automatically accepted, although it triggered the need to establish a procedure for future auditing of donation proposals.[91] It was then agreed that 'the receipt of any offers of proposed gifts be acknowledged by the Curator, with intimation that the offers would be submitted to the Committee for consideration.'[92] Nevertheless, the lengthy analysis of this issue in

[91] LCM 16-09-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.70.
[92] LCM 22-09-1904. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.74

Collingwood Stevenson's thesis demonstrates that no resolution had yet been found. Although Collingwood highlighted the value of gifts for provincial galleries, he also stated the difficulty of rejecting unsuitable gifts offered by influential people. He described what may have been the methods followed by his father to avoid offending donors, and even advised making some concessions to further the wider interests of the gallery. Concerned about the abundance of local art which kept being offered to the Laing, he stated the need to look for 'a reasonable standard of excellence', remembering that 'every care has to be taken to see that the gallery does not become overstocked with inferior works.'[93] In summary, his advice was to 'hold on to the policy tenaciously', resisting 'all temptations to accept gifts which are unworthy or unsuitable', in the belief that if the curator succeeded in spreading the idea that the gallery was following a concrete policy towards a definite aim, this would encourage more specific gifts 'from art lovers willing to fill the gaps' in the gallery collection.[94] In the case of accepting artworks, Collingwood advised on making terms clear with the donor through a written contract, on the lines of museum manuals of the time.[95] However, there is no evidence that the Laing used this system, which would have helped to reduce the ambiguity of bequests produced after long-term loans, as in the case of *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (see p.291).

D. THE WATERCOLOUR COLLECTION AND THE WIGHAM RICHARDSON FUND

The Laing's watercolour collection - still the gallery's most remarkable feature - was also CBS' most emblematic success. By 1957, it numbered over 1,000 examples, ranging from the seventeenth century to the 1950s. These had been obtained partly through purchases made from the Laing's loan exhibitions and occasional gifts by the National Art-Collections Fund, the Contemporary Art Society and the Northern

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[93] Op. cit. note 6, p. 41.
[94] Op. cit. note 6, p.39.
[95] See, for instance, Coleman, V. (1927). *Manual for small museums.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, p.125. Coleman suggested signing a written agreement where the donor would specify that his donation did not include limiting conditions, as a 'safe precaution against misunderstanding'.

Art Collections Fund, but mostly through gifts from individuals, such as the Miss Dobson Bequest (including drawings by T.M. Richardson, J.W. Carmichael and the donor's father, the architect John Dobson), the Sir Gainsford Bruce Collection of drawings of the Roman Wall, and the George E. Henderson Bequest.[96]

The Wigham Richardson Fund

About 15% of the Laing's watercolour collection was purchased through the Wigham Richardson Fund. Although it did not include a large amount of money, the Fund was important precisely because of the fact that, unlike most of the previous donations, it consisted of cash, and not artworks. This circumstance gave the Laing a rare opportunity to exercise an active choice in which artworks to acquire, something that explains the energy and time spent in contacting artists, collectors and dealers. The associated letters demonstrate not only the Laing's efforts, details of its collecting policy, the budget, its decision-making processes, its motivations, the aesthetic preferences and the interests of the gallery, but also the parameters of the access of provincial galleries to the British art market in the second quarter of the twentieth century.[97]

The Fund's origins and circumstances

It was only accidentally that the Laing obtained the accumulated income of the 2,000 ordinary shares of the company Swan, Hunter, and Wigham Richardson Ltd, which the shipbuilder John Wigham Richardson (1837–1908) had bequeathed to the Walker Mechanic's Institute in 1908, for its interest to be spent on the purchase of works of art to be exhibited at the Institute.[98] Favourable circumstances for the Laing

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[96] Stevenson, C.B. (1954). 'The work of the Laing Art Gallery and Museum during the last fifty years', p.3. TWA T.132/62.
[97] 'Wigham Richardson Bequest.' Laing Art Gallery Archive.
[98] John Wigham Richardson (1837–1908) was one of the founding members of the Laing Committee, and - like many of the early Laing benefactors - he was a Quaker. He played a key role in the development of the shipbuilding industry in the North-East through the creation of the Neptune Works, which in 1903 amalgamated with Swan Hunter of Wallsend to become Swan, Hunter, and Wigham Richardson Ltd, which, with Richardson as vice-chairman, became the largest merchant shipbuilding company on the Tyne. The company built the RMS Mauretania, the largest liner ever created on the Tyne. Moreover, Richardson was the co-founder of the journal *Shipping World* (1882), the founder of the North East Coast Institution of

began when, shortly before Richardson's death, the town of Walker was absorbed by Newcastle, thus meaning that its Mechanic's Institute was subject to review. Aware of this issue, Richardson started writing a codicil to his will, through which he intended to transfer the greatest part of his bequest to the Laing, with the remainder to be used for the general purposes of the Institute. However, he died without having the time to implement the codicil. The situation quickly worsened for the Institute, whose land went onto a leasehold held by the Newcastle Corporation, with twenty years to expire. Its large upstairs hall was let to the proprietor of a cinema and the ground floor rooms were declared unsuitable for an exhibition gallery. In the meantime, the accumulated income from the shares kept on growing because of the issue of bonus shares and the investment of the income in British Government stocks. By 1925, when Richardson's executors (his sons Sir Phillip W. Richardson and George B. Richardson) contacted the Laing, in an attempt to unblock the funds, the shares were valued at £3,200, and the accumulated income amounted to £2,216.16.4d. A Joint Committee consisting of four members of the Walker Mechanic's Institute and four members of the Laing Committee, plus CBS, was formed and empowered to spend the accumulated and future income of the shares on pictures. These pictures would be lent to the Laing on permanent loan, with labels showing their ownership, subject to the right of the Trustees to remove them and exhibit them elsewhere.[99]

The Fund's scope and evolution

Probably at Percy Corder's suggestion - who had already made a similar proposal two years earlier on the grounds that it would become 'a special feature of the

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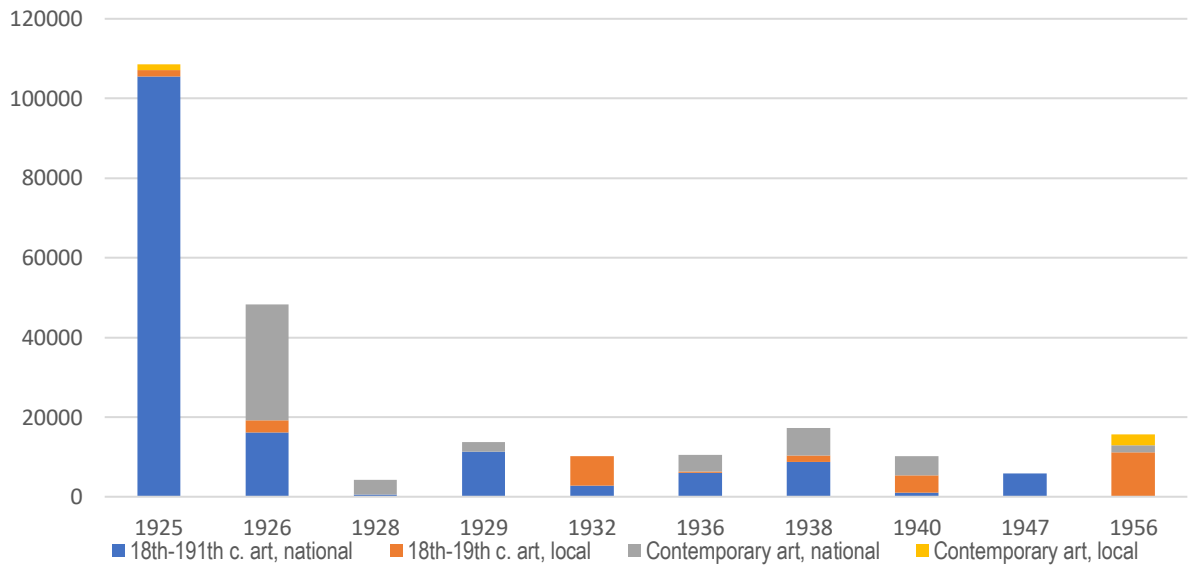
Engineers and Shipbuilders (1884), and the president of the Newcastle Economic Society from 1896 to 1897. He also played an active part in local affairs as a member of Northumberland county council and as a JP for Northumberland.
Besides his industrial activity, Richardson was also knowledgeable in arts and culture. He wrote Latin verses, and he travelled widely, visiting Poland, Russia, Greece, Turkey, North America, the West Indies, and Africa, and, being an enthusiastic artist himself, he made watercolour sketches of his travels. He gifted a big part of his art collection to the Walker Mechanics Institute, and donated a window in Christ Church, Walker. But his main contribution to the art world was the fund bequeathed to the Walker Mechanics Institute, which circumstances brought to the Laing in 1925. For more details, see pp.233-239 and Pimlott Baker, Anne (2004). 'Richardson, John Wigham (1837–1908)'. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (online ed.). Oxford University Press.

[99] LCM 30-01-1925 TWA MD.NC/129/3, p.492.

gallery' - the Joint Committee agreed to use the funds to improve the Laing's watercolour collection.[100] However, although purchases had been agreed to cover British masters from the seventeenth century, after one year, they started showing the same bias towards local artists and contemporary art that had characterized the Laing's purchasing policy (fig. 9). The first reason for this shift was the fast depletion of the funds available: as soon as October 1925 Corder defended the interests of 'modern masters', probably because by that time a third of the accumulated income had already been spent.[101] By the end of that first year, thirty-eight works had been purchased, including Turner's emblematic *Dinant sur Meuse* (see p.277) - and *Mont St. Michel* (1829), by J.S. Cotman (1782-1842). The later, costing £350, was the most expensive artwork purchased through the Fund. The fact that both watercolours were acquired through the prestigious dealer T. Agnew – whose stock was usually out of the range of the Laing's budget – and that several trips to London were made that year evidence that the Joint Committee was sparing no expense, in contrast with the more prudent purchasing strategies commonly employed by CBS. In 1926, the expenditure more than halved, and energies focused on the exhibitors of that year's RA Summer Exhibition, contacted directly following the opening of the exhibition. Purchases included one of the few oil paintings obtained through the Fund: *Alcantara Bridge* (1926) by Oliver Hall (1869-1957), which was bought for £300, thus being the second most expensive artwork acquired. Then, Corder's death in 1927 and the depletion of the accumulated income resulted in several pauses in purchases and a further shift in the policy for the following years, which privileged contemporary artworks acquired directly from the artists or from less prominent dealers, and locally-bought eighteenth- and nineteenth-century watercolours by Northumbrian artists such as Luke Clennell (1781-1940) or T.M. Richardson, Snr. However, British watercolours remained the goal throughout the years, and CBS' letters to dealers explicitly rejected oil paintings and foreign artists. Contemporary local art was not usually purchased, as this was the scope of the William Glover Fund (see pp.239-246), although a remarkable exception took place in 1956 with the

[100] Corder, like Wigham Richardson, was a Quaker, and may have been instrumental in the Laing's obtention of the Fund. Therefore, his opinions had a special weight in the decisions of the Joint Committee. LCM 27-04-1923. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.413.
[101] Anon (15-10-1925). 'Buy modern masters.' *North Mail,* n.p.

Fig.9. Evolution of the expenditure and the purchasing policy of the Wigham Richardson Fund over the years (amounts updated to their equivalent in pounds in 2018 to counteract inflation)



purchase of *Briar and Hawthorn at Savernake* (1952) by Lawrence Gowing (1918-1991).[102] Similar purchasing strategies were carried out by Collingwood Stevenson after his father's death, although the progressive decline of shipbuilding in Newcastle meant that the Wigham Richardson shares never regained their initial interest, so the most relevant purchases remained those carried out under Corder's direction in 1925 and 1926.

A significant change in the Fund's circumstances took place in 1941, when Newcastle Council wound up the Walker Mechanic's Institute.[103] The Laing, which by that time had already been loaned pictures to the value of £4,000, was informed that the Wigham Richardson trustees would have no more duties in connection with the Institute. Although the Wigham Richardson Fund member John Atkinson expressed the wish that the Joint Committee would continue to choose the pictures for the Fund, this never happened, and since 1942, all the members of the Wigham Richardson Sub-Committee were chosen strictly from the Laing Committee. Nevertheless, their absence was not especially noticeable on the purchasing policy, as the Walker Mechanic's Institute members had only objected once in the decision-making process - because of technical inaccuracies in connection to shipbuilding perceived in the painting *The Ship Lorenzo in Dry Dock* (1937), by Harry E. Allen (1894-1958), which therefore was not purchased -.[104] Besides this objection, it does not seem that the Wigham Richardson trustees had ever introduced any restrictions regarding subject matters for the watercolours purchased, which covered varied genres and did not show any special focus on marine scenes.

Reach and significance

Compared to other private purchasing grants received by regional galleries in similarly-sized cities, the Wigham Richardson Fund was not a significant one. In the

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[102] Although born in London, Gowing worked as a Professor of Fine Art at King's College (now Newcastle University) between 1948 and 1958 and was instrumental for the creation of the Hatton's permanent collection in the 1950s. Therefore, this purchase provides further evidence of the link existing between the Laing and the Hatton Gallery.
[103] Stevenson. C.B. (07-01-1942). Letter to W. Bourn. Laing Art Gallery Archive.
[104] Stevenson, C.B. (12-08-1938). Letter to Harry E. Allen. Laing Art Gallery Archive.

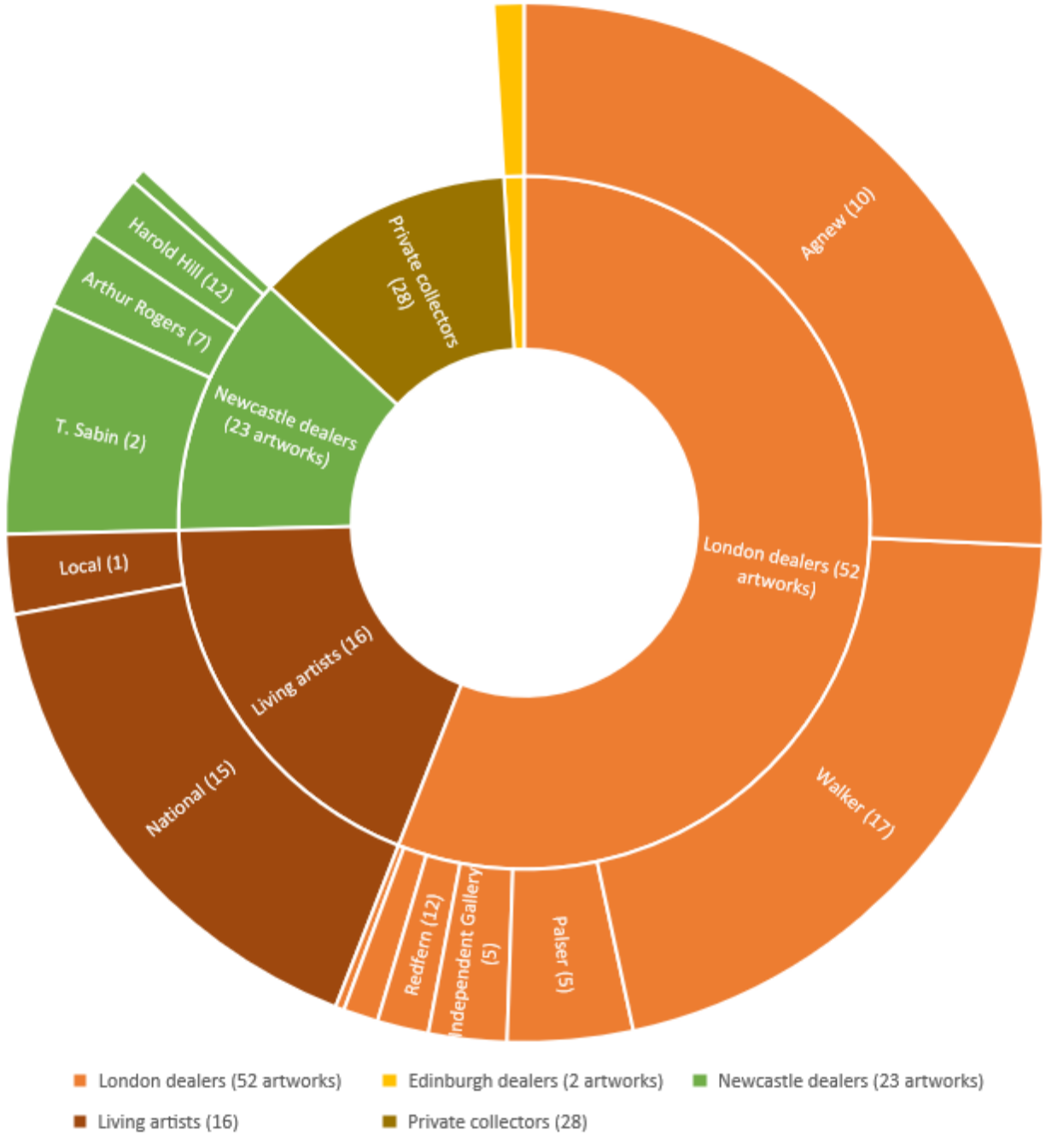
1950s, the Art Gallery and Industrial Museum in Aberdeen was receiving an annual average of £2,500 from trust funds, whilst the Ferens Art Gallery in Hull had a fund giving about £1,000 yearly.[105] Nevertheless, the careful management of the Wigham Richardson Fund allowed the steady purchase of a varied and representative collection of British watercolours, which became one of the most remarkable successes of the Laing's permanent collection. Moreover, the fortunate preservation of abundant relevant archival material provides not only first-hand details about the Laing's purchasing policy and strategies, but also more general information about art prices and dealers' strategies in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The letters evidence the generalised practice of negotiating prices with artists, the common strategy of purchasing several artworks at a time in order to obtain a discount, or the dealers' usual offer of a ten percent discount to regional galleries. These elements explain the Laing's preference for London galleries, whose bigger volume of sales allowed wider flexibility for negotiations (fig. 10). There was also a frequent connection with scholars acting as private collectors. In the case of the Wigham Richardson Fund, several eighteenth and nineteenth-century watercolours were purchased from Randall Davies (1866-1946), expert in English watercolours and art critic of the *Pall Mall Gazette*.[106] The Laing Committee had been in contact with the scholar since the 1920s, granting him permission to reproduce artworks owned by the gallery in his monograph about Joshua Cristall.[107] More intriguing, instead, are the purchases made through Howard Baker, a schoolmaster based in a small town in Surrey who sold to the Laing a significant proportion of watercolours.

E. THE PROMOTION OF LOCAL ART (1). THE WILLIAM GLOVER FUND

With a similar pecuniary amount, the Laing's second purchasing fund was key in the gallery promoting the cultural identity of the North East. It initially involved a donation

[105] Op. cit. note 47.
[106] Davies acted as the London adviser to the Felton Bequest (National Gallery of Victoria, Australia) and also sold several drawings to the British Museum. For Davies' role in the creation of Australian art collections see: Potter, M.C. (2019). *British Art for Australia, 1860–1953: The Acquisition of Artworks from the United Kingdom by Australian National Galleries.* Abingdon, Oxon, and New York: Routledge, pp.133-9.
[107] LCM 27-05-1926. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.570.

Fig.10. Wigham Richardson Fund: purchases according to their provenance.



of £800, but was supplemented by a further £1,500 received through two later bequests - the interest from which was intended to be spent in 'the purchase of artworks by local artists, say Newcastle, Northumberland and Durham.'[108] Offered to commemorate the first visit to Newcastle of members of the Royal Institute of British Architects (October 1905), it became the first significant donation received by the newly opened Laing. Its donor was the Windsor architect William M. Glover (1829-1912), who wanted to express his affection for 'the *canny city*' in which he had worked for a thirty year period, having 'the pleasure of personally knowing many members of the Council' (fig. 11).[109] Two of these Council members were Alderman Joseph Baxter Ellis and Johnstone Wallace, whose respective nominations as Newcastle Mayor and Sheriff were commemorated through Glover's gift. Perhaps not incidentally, Wallace was one of the founding members of the Laing Committee, and became its Chairman shortly afterwards.

Management and evolution

Between 1906 and 1912, the Fund's accumulated interest (which averaged about £35 per year) allowed the purchase of one or two artworks by living North-eastern artists every year. Exhibiting Northumbrian pride, the Laing Committee prioritised local scenes and rural landscapes, and - excepting a couple of examples of pottery and sculpture - solely purchased paintings in oil and watercolours from this bequest. Likely, the Glover Fund triggered the creation of the annual Exhibitions of Works by Artists from the Northern Counties, which started almost contemporarily (see pp.247-270). In fact, most of the works purchased through the Fund had been exhibited in the Laing's Northern Counties Exhibition in the same year they were acquired, because the Committee - following CBS' advice - used to visit the display before its closure to select the most outstanding examples. This process resembled a smaller version of the one followed by the Walker Art Gallery - which purchased works from

[108] NCR 25-10-1905. L352.042. N536N, p.752.
[109] Ibid.

Fig. 11. *Mr. and Mrs. William Glover* (n.d.), by Andrew Carrick Gow (1848–1920). Oil on canvas. Laing Art Gallery.

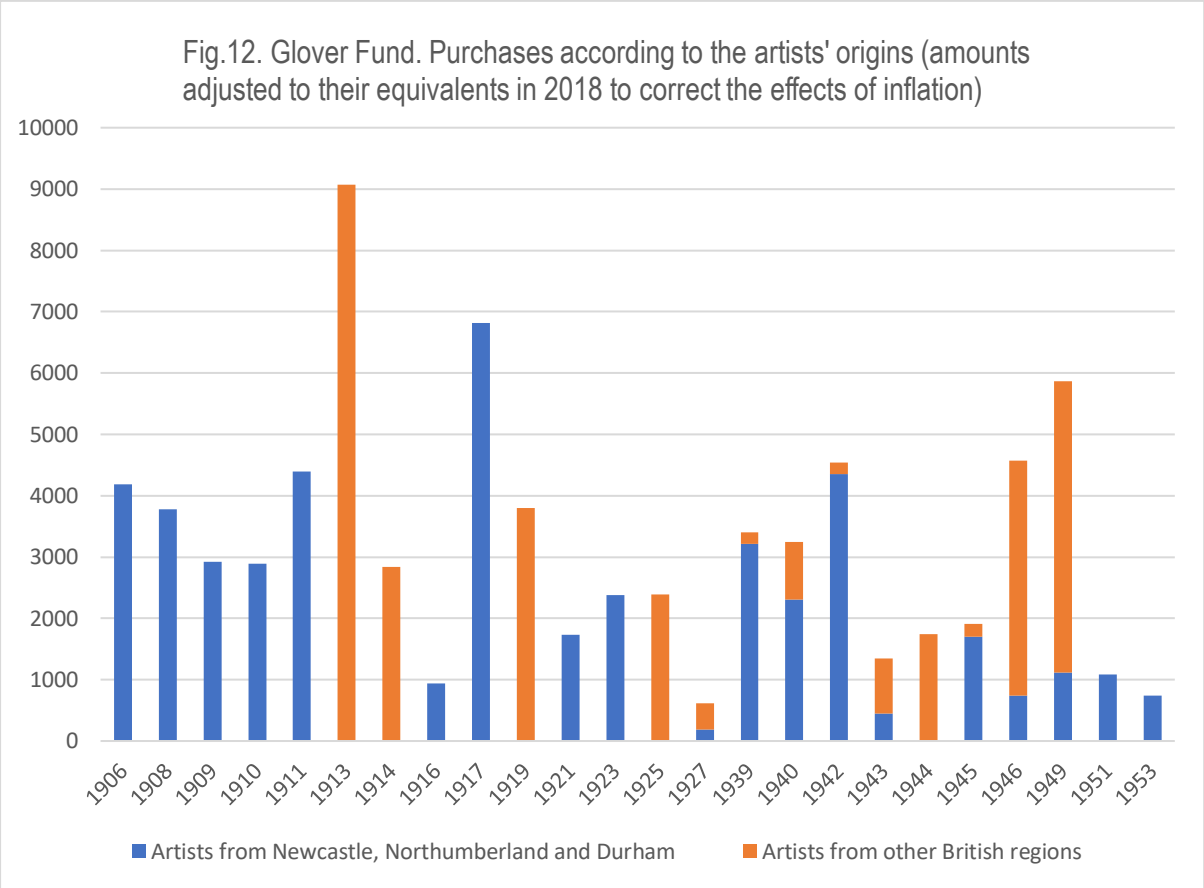
its Autumn Exhibition - or the Chantrey Bequest Trustees - which selected works from the RA Summer Exhibitions.[110]

Although the donor apparently did not take an active part in the selection process, his will to promote local art was respected and he was punctually informed of the upcoming purchases. Also, his connection to the Laing was kept active, which resulted in periodical gifts from his own art collection, including works by northern artists like J.W. Carmichael (1800-1868), John Mather (1848-1916) and H.H. Emmerson (1831-1895), personally selected by CBS from Glover's residence in London.[111] Shortly before his death, Glover contacted CBS to express his pride in having already secured five pictures for the Laing, and promised that he would not forget the gallery at his death, or at his daughter's death.[112] By July 1912, the Laing received a copy of Glover's will, stating that the testator had left £500 for the William Glover Fund and £1,000 worth of Government Bonds after the death of his daughter, plus some artworks (which the Laing Committee, following the strict policy described in this chapter, did not accept).[113] In 1927, with the death of Sarah Jane Dare (William M. Glover's only daughter), the promised sum of £1,000 in Government Bonds arrived, together with the reiterated instruction to spend their income 'in works of art executed by artists born or dwelling in the Counties of Newcastle, Northumberland or Durham.'[114]

Nevertheless, since Glover's death, the system underwent changes, the most obvious of which was an unwritten widening of the Fund's scope, which began to be occasionally used to purchase works by Scottish, Yorkshire and Lancashire artists (fig.12). The first exception to the rule happened just after Glover's death, with the purchase, for £80, of *The Sabbath Hat* (1905), by the Scottish artist Henry John Dobson (1858–1928). In absolute terms, this was the most expensive purchase

[110] In the case of the Walker, the regular purchases for the gallery's permanent collections served as a stimulus for the artists to participate. Op. cit. note 42, p.17.
[111] LCM 26-04-1907. TWA MD.NC/129/1, p. 228.
[112] Glover, W.M. (29-09-1911). Letter to C.B. Stevenson. TWA, MD.NC/129/2.
[113] Courrouse, E.S. (29-07-1912), Letter to the Newcastle Town Clerk. TWA, MD.NC/129/2.
[114] Anon (26-02-1927). 'Bequests to Laing Art Gallery'. *Daily Journal,* p.5e.

made through the Fund. However, although this painting is reported as acquired by the Newcastle Corporation through the Glover Fund, it does not form part of the



Laing catalogue, thus suggesting that the fund may have not been used exclusively for purchases for the Laing collection.[115] In later years, even artists based as far as Birmingham or Southport were included in the purchases, perhaps in an attempt to counteract the accusations of low quality and amateurism of the Northern Counties Exhibitions (see pp.247-270). Probably with the same aim of raising the quality of the purchases, the Laing Committee undertook several pauses, some of which were surprisingly long, especially the one occurred between the death of Glover's daughter and 1939. Another exception took place in 1917, with the purchase of the only work by a deceased artist: *Corfe Castle* (1909), by Niels M. Lund (1863-1916), whose memorial exhibition had just been held at the Laing.[116] With a cost of £100, this was also the most expensive local painting acquired through the Fund.

Impact

As with the Wigham Richardson Fund, the key point of the Glover Fund was not the amount of money awarded, but the fact that it was a monetary donation and not in kind, which allowed deliberate purchasing choices in connection to the promotion of - mainly - local art. Indeed, because of its early arrival, the fund had an important impact on the gallery's purchasing policy: firstly, it not only made the Laing make its first purchases of works of local subjects and by local artists, but also stimulated the periodical acquisition of local art, thus making it gain a significant presence in the permanent collection. Significantly, the Laing's first purchase ever, made in 1906, was *The Turnip Cutter* (1902), by the Newcastle-based A.H. Marsh (1842-1909), the £35 cost of which was paid through the Glover Fund. This situation helped the Laing enter the national debate regarding the duty of regional galleries to purchase local art, started because of an article published by the *Burlington Magazine*.[117] Secondly, because of its limited amount, the fund only occasionally allowed purchasing works

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[115] Who's Who & Who Was Who. (01-12-2007). Dobson, Henry John, (1858–1928). https://www-ukwhoswho-com.nls.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ww/9780199540891.001.0001/ww-9780199540884-e-195656

[116] Although born in Denmark, Lund grew up in Newcastle, and is famous for depicting its atmospheric urban landscape in oils such as *Newcastle upon Tyne from Gateshead* (1895) and *Newcastle upon Tyne from the East* (1898), both gifted to the Laing by prominent local collectors during CBS' period.

[117] Op. cit. note 42, p.57.

by established artists, being, instead, mostly used for purchasing works by promising young artists: this made it become a sort of annual scholarship for local art students. Indeed, 'encouraging young artists to produce pictures worthy of being selected for the gallery' had been one of Glover's wishes.[118] Thirdly, it helped artists to get to be known by the local public, whilst increasing Newcastle audiences' awareness of the value of their own artistic heritage. At the same time, it helped the Laing to strengthen ties with local arts schools - especially with King's College students and lecturers. Lastly, this local emphasis fostered a better connection between the gallery and its audiences: although some of the later purchases did not include local art, the initial introduction of elements of local identity in the Laing's permanent collection had already positioned the gallery in the local arts scene as a promoter and developer of a North-Eastern artistic language.

F. THE PROMOTION OF LOCAL ART (2). THE NORTHERN COUNTIES EXHIBITIONS

Between 1905 and 1962, the Laing hosted forty-three Exhibitions of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties. With nearly one million visitors over the years, it still is not only the most popular exhibition of regional art ever displayed by the gallery, but also the most frequently recurring event held throughout CBS' career. It is also the clearest example of the early Laing's interaction with contemporary local artists: through the Northern Counties shows, the gallery acquired the majority of its collection of local modern art, whilst acting as a showcase for regional artists and encouraging private patronage. The Laing was not the only northern gallery practising the dual role of institutional patron and sales venue for regional art: other regular public events in the region included Leeds City Art Gallery's 'Yorkshire Artists' Exhibitions' and Walker Art Gallery's 'Lancashire and Cheshire Artists' Exhibition', whilst further brief events took place in post-war times at Bradford, Bolton, Hull and Wakefield.[119] However, none of them enjoyed the long-lasting

[118] Glover, W. (29-09-1911). Letter to C.B. Stevenson. TWA, MD.NC/129/2, p.231.
[119] Op. cit. note 12, vol.1, p.65.

success of the Northern Counties exhibitions. The following paragraphs analyse the Laing's motivations for holding them and describe the keys of this success.

The Northern Counties exhibitions started nearly at the same time as the Laing itself. Already in 1904, CBS's proposal for future exhibitions included an 'Exhibition of Works by North British artists', which took place for the first time the following year.[120] The 1905 exhibition, however, was substantially different from its successors, since none of the exhibited works were for sale, and there was not any suggestion to repeat the event in the future, the idea of making it an annual event being probably connected with the award of the Glover Fund. It is also likely that the routine of purchasing one or two artworks per year from the Northern Counties underpinned both the Laing's motivations for holding these events, and their popularity amongst regional artists.

The financial aim

In several of its early events – like the Exhibition of the Royal Society of Painter-Etchers and Engravers (1907), the Exhibition of Works by the late Tom Browne (1910), or the Exhibition of Works by the Royal Society of Painters in Watercolours (1922) – the Laing relieved its financial difficulties by acting like a private gallery: a commission of 10% of the catalogue price was charged for every sale and catalogues were sold, usually providing much higher revenue than the commissions for the sales of the paintings. The same procedure was followed for the Annual Exhibitions of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties.

In spite of these earnings, the emphasis of previous research on the profitability of the Northern Counties may need to be revisited. While in her thesis, *Class, Nation and Localism in the Northumberland Art World, 1820-1939*, Rachel Mumba (2008) emphasizes the 'important financial role' of the Northern Counties, or the 'evidence that the exhibitions were a steady source of income for the gallery,' a closer look at

[120] LCM 15-12-1904. TWA, MD/NC/129/1, p.93.

the data offers a contrasting perspective.[121] Indeed, the earnings obtained by the Laing through the commissions on sales of paintings over the whole existence of the Northern Counties reveal an average annual profit of about £525, translated into 2018 amounts (fig.13).[122]

Because the Laing budget varied greatly through the years, 1921 has been chosen as an average example to illustrate the significance of this amount compared with the annual budget of the gallery. In that year, the Northern Counties profit on sales amounted to £10.12.1 (equivalent to approximately £528 in 2018), an amount which did not even reach 4% of the £279 that the Laing devoted to purchases in that same year, whilst the gallery's total annual maintenance expenses for the year were £3,960.[123] As usually, the Laing purchased two of the exhibits: the still-lives *Lustre* (1921), by William S Anderson (1854-1930), for £25, and *Fish out of water* (n.d.), by James Clark (1858-1943) for £10.10, making a total of £35.10, an amount that was three times more than the income obtained through the commissions on sales and which therefore was paid for through the Glover fund.[124] This example illustrates that - although commissions were helpful as a financial aid in the context of the Laing's long-standing funding difficulties - they were not relevant enough to justify by themselves the holding of the Northern Counties exhibitions as an income stream. Moreover, as income was partially reinvested in running the exhibition itself, these commissions can be understood as a means of fostering northern art.

Regarding the sale of catalogues, the income usually exceeded that from the commissions obtained by sales, although it must be considered that these are gross amounts, from which the publishing costs must be deducted. The average figure for catalogue sales in the Northern Counties exhibitions was £1,764.80 (in 2018). A year close to that average was 1919, when the sales of catalogues amounted to £34.3.9 (equivalent to £1,668.95 in 2018). The editing costs that year amounted to £28.10, which meant that the Laing obtained a profit of £5.13.9 (equivalent to £294 in 2018). Moreover, it must be remembered that the Laing sold catalogues of all exhibitions

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[121] Mumba, R. (2008) *Class, nation and localism in the Northumberland art world, 1820-1939.* (Doctoral thesis, Durham University, Durham, U.K.). Retrieved from http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2243/

[122] 'Register of pictures sold on the Northern Counties Exhibitions 1906-1942 and 1942-162.' TWA T.132/67 and T.132/68.

[123] Op. cit. note 121.

[124] LCM 28-10-1921. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.340.

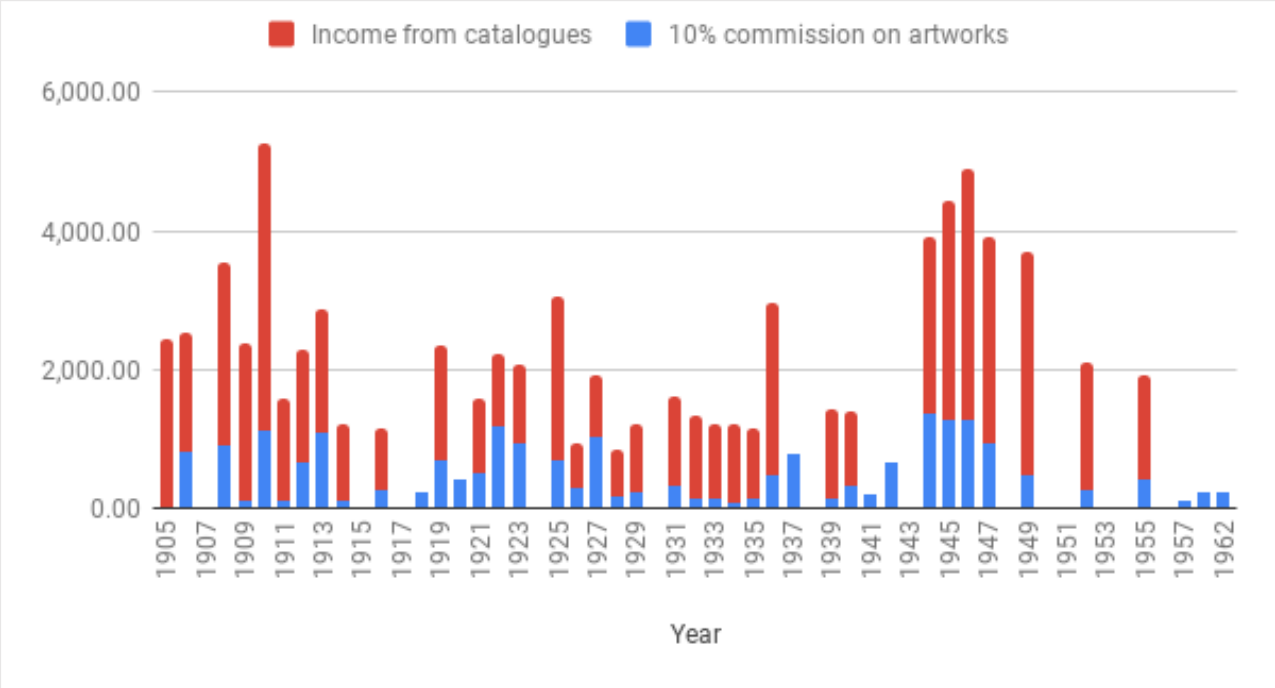

Fig.13. Income of the Northern Counties Exhibitions over the years. Amounts have been converted to their equivalents in 2018 through an inflation calculator, to render them feasible for comparison.[125]

[125] Bank of England Inflation Calculator. www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator..

held, and not only of the Northern Counties, which means that this profit would have been obtained even if the Northern Counties exhibitions had been replaced by a different show. Therefore, after reassessing the idea that the Northern Counties exhibitions were 'formed with the primary object of increasing revenue for the gallery', it is necessary to determine what other possible motivations underpinned the decision to keep the Northern Counties exhibitions running over such a long period of time.[126]

The creation of a local pictorial school

CBS' interest in education was not limited to his desire to instruct the Laing's visitors, but extended to the local artistic community. His reports on the Northern Counties exhibitions often discussed the Laing's role in strengthening a local pictorial school, which would get inspiration and increase its quality by studying the gallery's exhibitions and permanent collections:

> It is extremely gratifying to note the great progress made in local art since the inauguration of the exhibition for its encouragement in 1905. The Special Loan Exhibitions and the Permanent Collection of works of the highest class of art must have been of benefit in raising the taste and the aspirations of all who have had the opportunity of studying them, and being made more conscious of their intrinsic beauty and technical excellence.[127]

He even thought that the quality of the Northern Counties exhibition itself could serve as a stimulus for artists, and believed that 'each year has shown an advance in the quality of the work submitted which is an indication that the exhibition has had a stimulating and beneficial effect upon the exhibitors.'[128] These ideas contrast with the opinion that he was not interested in the educational potential of the Northern Counties' exhibitions:

> Whereas the educational importance of other loan and special exhibitions was stressed in the committee minute book, there was no such interest in

[126] Op. cit. note 121, p.177.
[127] LCM 25-07-1913. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.18.
[128] Stevenson, C.B. (1954). The work of the Laing Art Gallery and Museum during the last fifty years, p.12. TWA T.132/62.

> the Northern Counties exhibitions, where the curator gave prominence to issues of visitor numbers and profits, whilst making bland, repetitive statements regarding the quality of the exhibits.[129]

A similar sentiment is expressed by the assertion that 'there were no shows of contemporary local artists before the First World War. This is unsurprising as it was never a priority of the curator to promote a local "school"'.[130] This statement seems somewhat inaccurate if it is borne in mind that besides the eight Northern Counties Exhibitions taking place before 1914, there were two shows of works by the Armstrong College School of Art (1905 and 1906) and an exhibition of works by the Newcastle-born James Peel (1906), besides many other exhibitions of Scottish and Northern English Artists. It may simply be that the concepts of 'local' and 'regional' had a broader meaning for the early Laing Committee. The local press during the first half of the twentieth century also seemed to agree that the Laing exhibitions sought to promote a local school, of which critics even outlined a few features, like the abundance of sea scenes and northern landscapes, thus pointing towards a reputation of northern artists as a 'school of nature.'[131] Another controversial feature was the preference for watercolours: Mumba considers that the Laing Selection Committee preferred them because their cheaper prices facilitated sales:

> Commercial concerns seem to have been very much at the forefront of the curator's and the committee's policy for these exhibitions. This preoccupation can be seen in the types of exhibit the curator favoured, including many watercolours and his strategy seems to have been a move towards displays of handicrafts and jewellery as well exhibiting many amateur female artists who typically sold cheaply priced drawings and watercolours of undemanding subjects.[132]

Instead, press commentary argued that the Laing watercolour collection had contributed to the education of local artists and therefore raised the standard of the watercolours displayed at the Northern Counties exhibitions: 'quality this year [1937] is better than ever, particularly in the watercolour section, where it seems probable

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[129] Op. cit. note 121, p.180.
[130] Op. cit. note 121, p.175.
[131] Anon (12-04-1909). 'North-Country artists'. *Daily Chronicle,* n.p.
[132] Op. cit. note 121, p.180.

that good effect has been created by the gallery's permanent collection of watercolours.'[133] There was also a general awareness that the Northern Counties exhibitions were increasing the knowledge and awareness of Northern art: 'the exhibition will be a credit to the artists of the North. […]. We have, however, many artists the value of whose work has been recognised by critics of real discernment and a record of which we may be justly proud.'[134] These assertions imply a public recognition of the Laing's educational work and its task of promoting the development of regional art, in pursuit of the dual aims of helping the artists and getting audiences to know about them.

The encouragement of private patronage

In connection with its desire to create and promote a local pictorial school, the Laing tried to become a 'shop window' for regional artists, in the belief that sales would motivate them to create better works and thus increase the quality of Northern Art.[135] During the 1910s, and imitating the Walker, an Art Union was created in connection with the exhibition, aiming to encourage participation by improving 'the artists' financial results.'[136] When legal matters forced the Union to close, the Laing started arranging 'formal openings by suitable persons', like the Duke of Northumberland (1920) or Sir Johnstone Wallace (1921): the latter regretted the lack of patronage and suggested that 'the great coal-owners and shipowners might divert their attention from old masters to modern painters'.[137] Committee members and Laing-related local authorities attempted to lead by example and purchased several exhibits: for instance, in 1922, the then Laing Chairman, Major Robert Temperley, bought *At Anchor* (n.d.) by F.W. Corner for £5.5 and *April Blooms* (n.d.), by W.S. Anderson, for £12.12, whilst buyers in following years included the Committee members Alderman A.J. Robinson, H.B Saint and G.E. Henderson.[138]

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[133] Anon (05-12-1937). 'The North's own RA'. *Sunday Sun,* n.p.
[134] Anon (10-04-1909). *Weekly Chronicle,* n.p.
[135] Anon (11-01-1937). 'Hard times for artists.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[136] Browne, C. (01-08-1912). 'Northern Artists.' *Daily Chronicle,* n.p.
[137] Anon (10-10-1921). 'Plea for local art.' *Daily Journal,* n.p.
[138] Op. cit. note 122.

The Laing's mural decorations commissioned from local artists in the 1930s and 1950s (and paid through the Glover Fund) were also used to boost media attention to the Northern Counties exhibitions, by making the unveiling ceremonies coincide with the Northern Counties' openings. For instance, the simultaneous opening of the 1934 Northern Counties exhibition and the unveiling of the lunette decoration *Corpus Christi Day in Newcastle, 1450,* by Lisa Hodgson (1905-1980) attracted over 1,000 visitors. Framed in the context of the 1930s depression, this success, unfortunately, was not reflected in sales, and no purchases were made from the exhibition that year. The *Evening Chronicle* regretted that, despite the high quality and the ridiculously low prices, the money in the city was not 'in hands of the cultured'.[139] Various answers asserted that Newcastle's wealthy people were 'new-wealthy' and that they did not buy art for enjoyment, but just for commercial value: therefore, they preferred old masters 'which they are sure to be able to sell again at a profit'.[140] However, other opinions stated that rich people in Newcastle were not buying the exhibits because the artists were not famous enough: 'the poor pseudo-connoisseur dare not take any risks and so he does not buy'.[141] Although some voices asserted that the careful curatorial preselection ensured the quality of the exhibits, issues regarding the professionalism of the exhibitors were a constant throughout the years of holding the exhibition.[142]

Prestige for the Laing and provision of local art

Because in its early years the Laing lacked a permanent collection, the Northern Counties events were, for several reasons, a convenient source of exhibition materials. Firstly, they kept half of the upper-floor galleries busy for several months a year. Secondly, they could be arranged quickly and scheduled to cover the periods when the gallery did not have loan exhibitions. Thirdly, applicants were responsible for delivering and collecting their exhibits, which eliminated the problem of transportation costs. And last, they offered a preferential framework for purchases,

[139] 'Hexham' (28-02-1934). 'Newcastle artists neglected by wealthy.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[140] 'Quien Sabe' (14-03-1934). *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[141] 'Craft Worker' (14-03-1934). 'Appreciation of Art.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[142] 'Artist' (16-03-1934). 'Why not buy pictures?' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

because the best examples of regional talent were brought straight to the gallery, where the Committee had enough time to view them and the curator could negotiate prices with the artists, thus saving on dealers' commissions.

The fact that the Laing acted as a patron of the exhibitions attracted artists who wanted their work to enter the permanent collection. Moreover, the gallery's 'work of encouragement, by purchasing the works shown as far as funds allow', portrayed the institution as a promoter of local art, thus helping it gain respectability amongst local audiences and artists.[143] However, the modest size of the Glover Fund limited the gallery's patronage: critical voices pointed out that - although the Fund helped to cover the lack of private buyers - it was 'a pity that artists are not paid as generously as in the Chantrey Bequest.' [144] Indeed, the funding shortages were one of the elements deterring first-rate artists from submitting their work, thus contributing to the gradual decline in quality of the exhibitions.

The exhibitors

The only condition requested for artists to submit work to these exhibitions was a proven relationship to the Northern Counties, either because of their origins or by residence. For the Laing, the concept had a broader meaning than what is acknowledged today: although the area of acceptance had been fixed as sixty miles around Newcastle, in practice it included most of Northumberland, Durham, Cumbria, North Yorkshire and both sides of the Scottish borders.[145] Nevertheless, and probably due to the closeness to their studios, the exhibitions kept a preponderance of Newcastle-based artists, despite the Laing's efforts to invite 'distinguished men of the Northern Counties' who could help to 'raise the standard of the exhibition.'[146] It has been argued that - unlike the Bewick Club exhibitions of the 1880s and 1890s -the Northern Counties exhibitions

[143] Anon (06-05-1949). 'Art exhibition made city record.' *Newcastle Journal and North Mail,* n.n.
[144] Anon (02-08-1911). Laing Art Gallery. *Evening Mail,* n.p.
[145] Anon (19-07-1911). 'Northern Artists.' *Evening Mail*, n.p.
[146] LCM 23-04-1920. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.276.

> did not seek to foster a local identity or to protect local artists' interests, for obvious financial reasons. In fact, the exhibitions are best seen as a sideline commercial and populist venture, which increasingly focused on handicrafts and cheap amateur works.[147]

However, the main reason for this broader choice of artists was probably not financial, but simply an attempt to achieve a sufficient standard of quality. Indeed, the local art scene had significantly declined before the First World War (mainly due to the gradual death of most of the artists active in the 1880s and 1890s), and although a new wave of creators arrived after the consolidation of the Art School in Armstrong College (1912), it was not strong enough to ensure a sufficient standard of quality for a more geographically-restricted exhibition.[148] This may explain CBS' reluctance to exhibit works by living local artists outside of the Northern Counties scheme. For instance, when the Committee suggested creating a room for local artists to exhibit their works, 'in order to encourage them in their efforts', the curator promised that 'full consideration would be given to the suggestions made by the Committee', but never came up with any proposal.[149] The reasons behind this rejection are possibly related to a desire to increase the prestige of the gallery in the face of the proliferation of journalistic criticism that accused the Laing of exhibiting amateur or low quality work. The most frequent spokesman of this type of opinion was Ivan Geffen, art critic of the *Newcastle Chronicle* and firm defendant of modern art, whose writings used to compare the exhibitions of the Hatton with those of the Laing to the detriment of the latter.

Actually, the 1952 exhibition, which limited the display to 'works by artists born or living in Northumberland and Durham', was a total failure in sales and in reviews.[150] CBS defended the decision by arguing that 'when the exhibition was open to all the Northern Counties, the big man always took a lot of the space. We are trying to help the local man'.[151] However, Geffen denounced the

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147 Op. cit. note 121, p.180.
148 Newton, L. (2001) *The Cullercoats Artists' Colony c.1870-1914.* (Doctoral Thesis, Northumbria University, Newcastle, U.K.), p.62. Retrieved from https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.343880.
149 LCM 31-07-1953. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.226.
150 LCM 25-07-1952. TWA MD/NC/129/6, p.193.
151 Anon (05-11-1952). 'At the Laing'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

> depressingly high proportion of thoroughly bad pictures. Technical ineptitude vies with lack of taste and overcrowding. To make matters worse, the professional artists, for the most part, lead the amateurs only in their determination to do ill what was better done two generations ago.[152]

Exhibitors joined in with complaints against the organisers, arguing that 'the fault does not lie with the painters, and without support in the provision of spaces and good independent selectors we cannot make up a worthwhile show'.[153] Curiously, the local artist Byron Dawson – despite having had several pieces purchased from the Northern Counties exhibitions in the 1940s – joined the polemics by stating that 'art shows should not be held in public art galleries which are essentially museums and which ought to contain only those works which have stood the test of time or have historical interest.'[154] The failure caused an unprecedented three-year interruption of the event, until finally the pressures of the public and the artists prevailed, and the exhibition was reassumed in 1955, but going back to the old politics of hosting artists from the wider North. This further change of direction illustrates the importance that the Laing gave to criticism, thus reinforcing the theory that social prestige was one of the motivations that underpinned the celebration of the Northern Counties. Indeed, references to the 1952 misfortune continued in 1955:

> The circumstances of the last one were hurried, to say the least, and the result was a dreadful hotchpotch varying from magazine-cover commercial works in the most doubtful aesthetic taste to downright incompetence of the most ham-handed variety. Spurred by public opinion the authorities hastily threw together a show without any attempt at informed selection and the local critics justly condemned the result.[155]

The belief that the exhibition had been discontinued for political reasons (such as complaints from influential artists whose work had been rejected) spread. The Laing was accused of pursuing an 'ostrich policy' and the objectivity of its selection committee was called into question.[156] Probably, these accusations contributed to the progressive loss of prominence of the event, and, after the exhibitions of 1957

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[152] Geffen, I. (04-12-1952). 'Good art (and bad) on show in City'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[153] Dobson, E.S. (05-12-1952). 'Artist's view.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[154] Dawson, B. (12-12-1952). 'Art Amateurs.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[155] Dobson, S. (16-05-1955). 'NE art needs a new spirit.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[156] Roberts, W.J. (16-06-1955). 'Art Exhibition.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

and 1962 did not achieve the recognition of previous occasions, the Northern Counties ceased for good.

Another aspect raising debate was the simultaneous display of amateur and professional artists:

> Alongside pictures priced at from £100 to £420 are hung those of miners, artisans, tradesmen, and unemployed workmen. To them art is a pleasing hobby – yet only on their merits do they pass the selection committee and secure the honour of exhibition.[157]

These different degrees of expertise became more evident after the ascent of the so-called Pitmen Painters towards the end of the 1930s, causing huge differences in the prices of the paintings. In 1937, for instance, works priced above £300 and sent from London by artists like Cowan Dobson (1894–1980), Henry R. Dobson (1901-1985), and Thomas C. Dugdale (1880-1952) hung next to amateur canvases priced at 10s.[158] There was similar diversity in the age ranges of exhibited artists and their consequent varying amount of experience: for instance, in 1945, exhibits by a teenager George Wall (1930-1974) coexisted with those painted by the veteran George Horton (1859-1950).[159] Indeed, because of the long timespan of the exhibition series, different generations of artists can be traced through the various shows: there was an initial period of painters with a Victorian training, like John Atkinson (1863-1924), John Charlton (1849-1917), Thomas B. Garvie (1859-1944), Ralph Hedley (1848-1913) and Robert Jobling (1841-1923), most of whom died before the modernist wave arrived, and a later generation of artists, some of whom were connected to the Armstrong College School of Art and dealt with a newer artistic sensitivity, like John Thomas Y. Gilroy (1898-1985), Mary Kirby (n.d), John Robert Murray MacCheyne (1911-1982), A.D. Mainds (1881-1945), Thomas William Pattison (1894-1983) or James Walker Tucker (1898-1972). The involvement of these Kings' College members sometimes resulted in curious situations, with the work of students being exhibited together with that of their masters (and in some cases, Laing Committee members). The reasons behind this disparity of artists

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[157] Anon (23-02-1935) 'Hobby wins reward.' *Sunday Sun,* n.n.
[158] Anon (13-12-1937). 'Northern Artists' Exhibition.' *Newcastle Journal,* n.n
[159] Anon (14-05-1945). 'Artists keep war off their canvases.' *Newcastle Journal,* n.n.

probably lay in a combination of commercial criteria, a desire to please a broader range of visitors, and an old-style of curating which favoured crowded walls, in the fashion of the RA Summer exhibitions.

Also noteworthy was the unusual presence of female artists, rising to 24% in 1905, to 33% in 1913 and to more than 50% in 1935, figures that have also been attributed to commercial reasons:

> Of course there were paintings by notable artists such as Isabella Thompson, Laura Knight (1877-1970) and Alice Van Heddeghem (n.d.), whose oil paintings could command £36, however, on the whole the majority of the works displayed by female artists were likely to have been by amateurs, who mostly exhibited undemanding watercolours and sketches of children and flowers and handicrafts. The large presence of such work was further evidence therefore, that the Northern Counties exhibitions were intended to be commercial and not displays of high art or Northumbrian identity.[160]

Nevertheless, this explanation sidelines many other professional female artists who played an important role in the Northern Counties exhibitions and whose exhibits were priced similarly to those of their male colleagues. Besides Louisa Hodgson (the lecturer at King's College and artist of one of the lunette decorations), there was Eva Carter (1870-1963), artist, writer and critic for the *Evening Chronicle,* whose work was on show at the Northern Counties since 1919, being purchased both by the Laing and the Shipley, and Dod Procter (1890-1972), whose controversial portrait *Indolence* (1934) had previously been exhibited at the RA. But there were also a good number of lesser-known professional female artists whose works always appealed to the Selection Committee because their placid subjects were thought to fit with the style of the Northern Counties school, because their artworks were usually cheaper than those of the male artists, and also because they pleased female visitors, even generating a very popular section of press reviews signed by the art critic Edith Base. One of these reviews, appearing in 1940, praised female artists like Constance Rea (c.1866-1952), 'whose work is nearly as well-known at the Laing as that of her distinguished husband [Cecil Rea (1861-1935)]' and W. Weatherall (active 1929-1935) - Gosforth Secondary School art mistress and former

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[160] Op. cit. note 121, p.179.

Newcastle School of Art student - whilst highlighting 'the pleasant, quiet mood and general charm. I don't remember a more peaceable collection. Is it that the artists have been seeking solace from wartime disquiet in the fields and untroubled trees and rivers?'[161]

The lack of involvement of artists in the management of the exhibitions has also been criticised:

> The executive power was concentrated in the hands of the Laing's committee and curator and the public role of the artist as arbiter was sidelined. Indeed, any co-operation, in the decision-making processes of the gallery with local artists was slight and short-lived. Similarly, by denying the exhibition of certain groups' work, on the reasonable grounds that such work could be seen at the Northern Counties exhibitions, the gallery substituted artist-led exhibitions for commercial-led displays.[162]

Whilst this statement applies to the first years, the situation changed from 1925, when members of King's College School of Art (Professor Hatton, then Professor A.D. Mainds) and later C. Marfitt-Smith (painter and Master of art at the Royal Grammar School) joined the Laing Committee and the Northern Counties Selection Committee, giving their voice on issues such as the calendar of the exhibitions, their contents or the presence of the artists in the catalogues. The absence of 'artist-led agitation in the press against the actions of the Laing' is understandable, because the Northern Counties exhibitions offered artists an accessible opportunity to exhibit their work and to have it purchased by local collectors or by the Laing itself.[163] Actually, the event was so popular amongst local artists that their lobbying forced it to keep running even in times of difficulties or substantial changes in the exhibition programme. For instance, during the Second World War, CBS explained: 'in the early days of the war it was uncertain that the exhibition would be held, but so great was the number of inquiries and requests from artists and the general public that it was decided to go ahead with the venture which is now the most popular of Northern exhibitions.'[164]

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[161] Base, E. (26-03-1940). 'Women Artists' work at the Laing.' *Newcastle Journal,* n.p.
[162] Op. cit. note 121, p.182.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Anon (09-03-1940). 'Newcastle Art Exhibition. Arresting Painting by Scarborough Woman.' *Northern Echo n.p.*

The selection process

About two months before the opening of every exhibition, the gallery received and examined the artworks (fig.14).[165] CBS described the process in the following way: 'Starting as a comparatively small exhibition, the number of works sent has increased to over one thousand, from which the Selection Committee chooses a little over half.'[166] These numbers give a point of comparison with related events in other regional galleries, such as the Walker's Autumn Exhibition, which displayed an average of 2,000 works p.a.[167]

The quality of the artworks selected was a recurring issue. Although criticism until the end of the Second World War was generally positive, it often mentioned that the standard of the Northern Counties was not comparable to the rest of the Laing's exhibitions and occasional voices complained against the excessively local focus: 'In determining the merit of such an exhibition, the limitations of the area from which contributions have been received must necessarily be taken into account.'[168] Since 1909, reviews urged the gallery to raise the selection parameters:

> This standard is yet too lenient, for it pretty well touches the bedrock of mediocrity; but it can reasonably be hoped that it represents only a step in a sliding-scale the gradual rise of which must lead ultimately to the elimination of such pictures as should never be subjected to a more trying ordeal than the good-natured gaze of the painter's admiring friends.[169]

CBS paid good attention to the feedback, and tried to include 'Academy, Royal Institute, Royal Watercolour Society, Royal Scottish Academy and other important exhibits.'[170] Better-known artists were contacted through special invitations and RA exhibitors were sought. For instance, in 1920, up to twenty-two RA exhibitors were selected.[171] Professor Hatton's appointment in 1925 strengthened the connexion to the contemporary art world and brought new ideas which were the fruit of his experience as an artist. He proposed, for instance, a system of *hors concours* for a

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165 LCM 27-11-1925. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.547.
166 Stevenson, C.B. (1954). The work of the Laing Art Gallery and Museum during the last fifty years, p.12. TWA T.132/62.
167 Op. cit. note 42, p.27.
168 Anon (12-04-1909). 'North-Country art.' *Daily Journal,* n.p.
169 Anon (12-04-1909). 'Northern Painters work at the Laing Art Gallery.' *The Yorkshire Post,* n.p.
170 LCM 25-07-1913. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.18.
171 LCM 23-04-1920. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.276.

Fig.14. The Laing Committee choosing paintings for the Northern Counties Exhibition in 1936. TWA.

few works to be accepted without having to be judged, something that he believed would help to raise the standard, because if an artist was sure that his work would be in, he would send the best examples he had.[172] However, his proposal to reduce the total number of accepted works was rejected, probably because it would have altered the sales and curation policies. Instead, and following the Walker's Autumn Exhibitions, CBS created a new 'list of artists specially invited.'[173]

The style of the artworks chosen favoured what local critics defined as 'placidity.'[174] Indeed, the selection criteria was mainly conservative, obeying a deliberate intention to please as wide a public as possible, consequently benefiting conventional pieces. This preference became more noticeable from the 1930s, with the spread of the debate around modernism. For instance, press comments in 1937 stated that 'there is little in it from the extreme and abstract forms of expression.'[175] In 1939, the exhibition contained 'much that is pleasingly decorative, a good deal that is interesting and thoughtful, and some pieces which are provocative'.[176] The simple and straightforward technique, which had no 'tortured modernist treatments', was praised.[177] However, by the 1950s, when modernist styles had already become mainstream, the opinion that the Northern counties displayed old-fashioned art spread: 'there are few of the moderns here: most techniques are of a variety some folk think outmoded. Generally, it is the average man's show.'[178] Probably the impression that the Northern Counties represented the art of a time already gone also had a significant weight in the decision of discontinuing the event.

The genre of the works accepted also evolved through time. Whilst until 1907 the exhibition was limited to paintings, by 1908 the range extended to black and white drawings, miniatures and sculpture. Then, in 1909, a further and definitive extension was agreed in order to accept craftwork, such as bookbinding, jewellery, needlework and woodcarving. The choice can be seen as a commercial strategy, in order to

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172 LCM 29-01-1926. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.551.
173 LCM 26-02-1926. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.555.
174 Anon (14-11-1936). 'Northern Artists' Exhibition.' *Daily Journal,* n.p.
175 Anon (11-12-1937). 'North Artists' Exhibition.' *Newcastle Journal,* n.p.
176 Anon (28-01-1939). 'Healthy North Country Art.' *Northern Echo,* n.p.
177 Anon (28-01-1939). 'Works by North Artists.' *Newcastle Journal,* n.p.
178 PIA (18-08-1955). 'They are proving it now.' *Newcastle Journal,* n.p.

increase income, but the Laing defended it as 'warmly welcomed', and featuring a 'valuable and close connection with the needs of modern industry.'[179] On his constant search for 'the application of art to utility', CBS also defended it because of its usefulness.[180] The trend of displaying crafts in order to reach a less affluent public was quite generalised amongst regional galleries: the Walker had been doing so since 1902.[181]

Also relevant to the selection process was the number of works accepted from each artist, which apparently did not have limitations in the first year: for instance, Mary Watson (1875-1925) exhibited nine pieces.[182] Since 1914, works by each artist were limited to four.[183] This number suffered a further reduction in 1925, when the maximum to be accepted was limited to three.[184] Reductions continued in the following years, again probably following the trend set by the Walker: in 1945 artists complained about being allowed to submit only two examples and asked for permission to send in a retrospective work in addition.[185] Indeed, the number of works accepted in the last years was lower than in the RA, thus suggesting that the popularity of the Northern Counties amongst local artists was not declining.

Curation

The biggest curatorial challenge was the display of the selected artworks in the limited space available - three of the four upper galleries in the earlier years, later limited to two once the first examples of the permanent collection were acquired. The local press generally celebrated this reduction, on the grounds that 'no room has been left for the very crude effort of the commencing amateur.'[186] Only one critic suggested that 'the exhibition would be all the stronger and more enjoyable if there

[179] Anon (23-03-1909). 'Northern Artists' Work'. *North Mail,* n.n.
[180] Anon (30-12-1940). 'Artists must live.' *Newcastle Journal and North Mail,* n.p.
[181] Op. cit. note 42, p.27.
[182] Stevenson, C.B. (1905). *Catalogue of the Exhibition by Artists of the Northern Counties*. Newcastle: Laing Art Gallery.
[183] LCM 24-04-1914. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.46.
[184] LCM 08-10-1925. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.539.
[185] LCM 29-06-1945. TWA MD/NC/129/6, p13.
[186] Anon (15-09-1911). 'North Country Art.' *Daily Journal,* n.n.

were only two lines of pictures on the walls, with some spacing between each picture and a draped background.'[187]

CBS usually divided the artworks according to their techniques, leaving one 'main gallery' for the oils, whilst squeezing into the other the watercolours and drawings, with central panels holding the crafts and sculptures. With an annual average of nearly 500 works, a modern visitor would have found the galleries overwhelmingly crowded, but these curatorial decisions need to be put into their early twentieth-century context, when the practice of hanging pictures from the ground level to the ceiling was still regarded as normal, and the Northern Counties exhibits were perceived to be displayed spaciously:

> It is something to be thankful that two galleries of carefully spaced and, as a whole, admirably hung pictures replace the three galleries of last year's exhibition. The gain in artistic effect and in strength by this condensation of the available material is invaluable, and the spacing does away with any risk of nerve-wracking to which the spectator is so often subjected in a crowded-up exhibition.[188]

This old-style curation started to be seen differently from the late 1930s, when the complaints about the galleries being overcrowded increased:

> It is to be deplored that the committee responsible for the hanging of the works at the Northern counties exhibition in the Laing Gallery should persist in having several of the pictures placed on the floor level on screens, there to remain unobserved. If it is not possible to give the works a reasonable display, why are they accepted for the exhibition? I cannot imagine any of the artists who are sufferers in this respect, being flattered by the high privilege of having their works so relegated, any more than I can envisage patrons going down on hands and knees to view these pictures.[189]

Local media, nevertheless, were supportive of this curatorial policy, on the grounds that 'the Art Gallery Committee tries to give a fair show to every artist who sends in.'[190] And apparently the Laing did not take into account these criticisms, as similar numbers of exhibits were accepted in the following years, even reaching peaks of up

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[187] Anon (19-07-1911). 'Northern Artists.' *Evening Mail,* n.p.
[188] Anon (12-04-1909). 'Northern Painters work at the Laing Art Gallery'. *The Yorkshire Post,* n.p.
[189] 'Art Lover' (02-02-1939). 'Exhibition Critic.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[190] 'Non-exhibitor' (07-02-1939). 'Show by Newcastle artists.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

to 650 exhibits in 1944 and 656 in 1945. Indeed, the visual comparison with the layout of the RA Summer Exhibition does not offer significant differences (fig.15).

Further curatorial challenges regarded the short time available to arrange such a large amount of pictures, so that the staff worked against the clock before the openings (fig.16).[191] Although the exhibitions have been criticised as 'both easy to organize and profitable' and lacking 'curatorial interest […] from an aesthetic point of view', the ability to give coherence to the large diversity of subjects was much praised at the time.[192] Art critics of the time appreciated the 'masterly manner in which such a varied collection is arranged' and 'the careful and discreet manner in which the pictures had been selected and the admirable way in which they were hung.'[193]

Periodicity

The Northern Counties exhibitions ran at intervals of approximately one year, although they suffered several interruptions owing to adverse historical circumstances (e.g. in 1915 and 1917 during the First World War, in 1930 due to the depression and in 1943 during the Second World War), management issues in the gallery (e.g. due to delays in previous exhibitions in 1907 and 1924, or coincidence with other exhibitions in 1951, 1953 and 1954) or other unascertained reasons (e.g. in 1938, 1948, 1950, 1956, and 1957).[194] Moreover, there were frequent fluctuations in their duration: although there was an average duration of two months, probably because of its calendar being conditioned by bigger shows, some of the exhibitions were much longer (as in 1925, with 135 days) or shorter (like the one in 1926, which lasted only twenty-eight days). Although a suggestion was made to keep the exhibition open for shorter periods, not exceeding six weeks, this was never brought into practice.[195]

The same variations existed regarding the position of the Northern Counties

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[191] LCM 27-09-1912. TWA, MD/NC/129/2, p.271.
[192] Op. cit. note 121, p.176.
[193] Anon (16-09-1910). 'Art in Newcastle.' *Daily Chronicle,* n.n.
[194] Op. cit. note 128, p.22.
[195] LCM 24-09-1926. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.586.

Fig.15. Left: The Main Galleries during the 1956 Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London (*Royal Academy*). Right: The private opening of the 1939 Northern Counties Exhibition, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. *Sunday Sun.* (29-06-1939), n.p.

Fig.16. CBS supervising the arrangements for the Northern Counties exhibition. *North Mail.* (04-11-1936), n.p.

exhibitions in the annual calendar, with examples of events starting in all the different months of the year. In this regard, in 1907 CBS met Ralph Hedley (then President of the Bewick Club), who asked for the Northern Counties not to be held in November, when the Bewick Club Exhibition took place.[196] The agreement was respected for a couple of years, and the Bewick Club members were highlighted in the exhibitors' lists, but then the calendar was altered again from 1910. From the 1920s, there was a further attempt to schedule a date, with Professor Hatton defending 'the interest of the artists' and several openings taking place towards the end of the year, apparently as a result of CBS' consultation with artists.[197] Likely, this preference for December was influenced by the artists' prioritisation of more important annual events, such as the RA Summer Exhibition and the Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibition. It also avoided the Laing to fight over works with other Northern galleries, as most regional exhibitions were held in autumn.[198] The chosen date, however, was moved back to November in 1926 and then kept on being continuously rescheduled afterwards, thus suggesting that the Laing was prioritising other loan exhibitions that were more difficult to arrange.[199]

Audiences

The strongest feature of the Northern Counties exhibitions was their long-lasting popularity. Although the stunning visitors' figures of the first year were never repeated, over the whole span of their existence these free-entry exhibitions maintained an average of nearly 400 people per day (fig.17), even when similar regional events were losing visitors.[200] Probably, the success in audiences was partly related to the fact that - like a local version of the Summer Exhibitions of the RA – the Northern Counties they were not just an art show, but also a social

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[196] LCM 05-04-1907. TWA MD/NC/129/1, p.221.
[197] LCM 24-04-1925. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.515.
[198] Moore, J. (2018). *High culture and Tall Chimneys. Art institutions and urban society in Lancashire, 1780-1914.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.86.
[199] LCM 26-02-1926. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.555.
[200] The Walker Autumn Exhibition started having losses in audiences and sales around 1908, with both falling sharply after 1910. Dibdin attributed this failure to the rise of 'picture palaces and the taste for motoring'. See: Morris, E. and Stevens, T. (2013). *The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1873-2000*. Bristol: Sanson & Co., p.27.

gathering. Indeed, press reviews used to gossip about the members of the local elite attending the openings, or the relationship of some exhibitors who were famous personalities.[201]

The Laing gave special importance to the visitors' figures, and made efforts to increase them by arranging school visits: for instance, in 1931, 523 students from thirteen schools attended, in what can only be explained as a desire to increase awareness of local art, because for obvious reasons the pupils were not potential buyers.[202] There was also a desire to advertise this popularity by contacting the press and giving notice of the visitors' figures. However, there was no correlation between the number of visitors and the income obtained, so perhaps this popularity – and not the sales – underpinned the Laing's decision to continue holding the Northern Counties exhibitions over the years, even after their artistic interest had been questioned.

Cessation

The decline of the Northern Counties exhibitions relates to a sum of factors, encompassing changes in aesthetic tastes (so these exhibitions were perceived as representations of an old-fashioned way of making and exhibiting art), as well as a decrease in the quality of the works and in the sales' revenue, featuring a progressive increase in the sale of craft articles and a decrease in the prices of the paintings sold.[203] Surely the bargaining on the prices of the artworks (usual both from the buyers and from the gallery itself) discouraged the participation of most artists with a reputation in the art market, who preferred to sell their work elsewhere and get higher benefits. Therefore, the Laing did not succeed in its original aim of encouraging private patronage, also because the gallery lacked adequate sales officers to look after the transactions.[204]

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[201] One example of the above took place in 1944, when a painting by the sixteen-year old Colin Bramwell, son of Councillor Bramwell, was accepted. Anon (23-03-1944). 'North Art Beats the War'. *Newcastle Journal,* n.p.
[202] LCM 27/03/1951. TWA MD.NC/129/4, p.143.
[203] Op. cit. note 122.
[204] Contemporary press reports criticised this absence. See: Anon (02-08-1911). 'Laing Art Gallery.' *Evening Mail*, n.p.

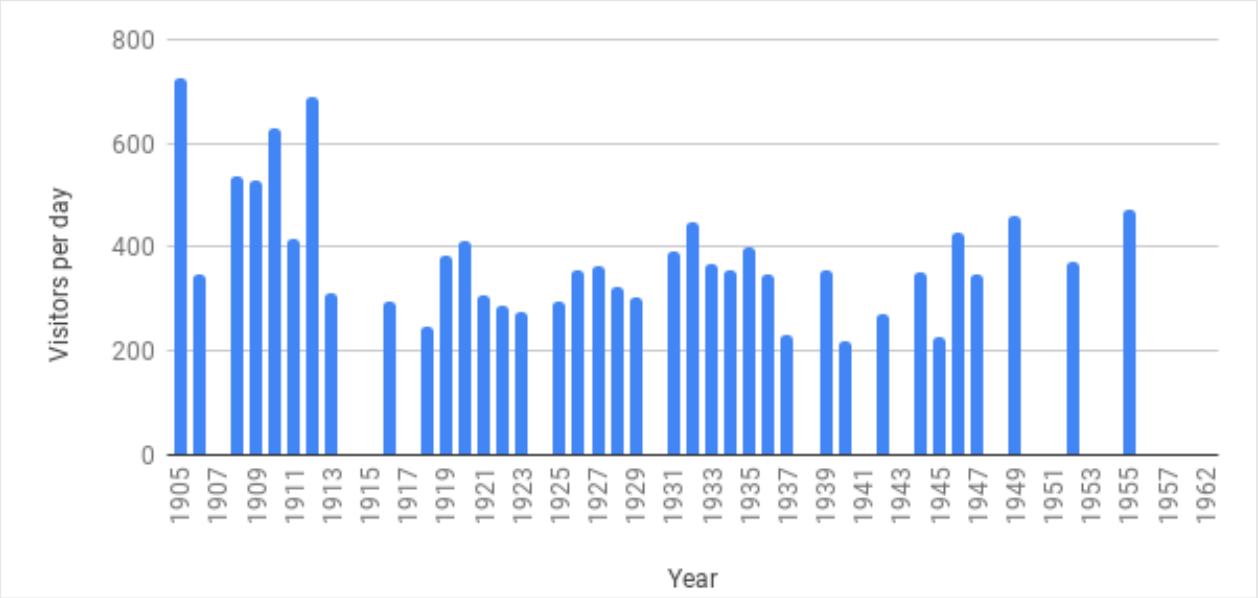

Fig. 17. Northern Counties' average number of visitors over the years.

However, the key reason was probably the Laing's failure to stimulate the creation of a local art school at a professional level. The preponderance of amateur and conservative works resulted in declining standards of the artworks shown and a loss of prestige, so that in its last years, renowned Northern artists refused to participate. Moreover, the development of the Federation of Northern Art Societies and its exhibitions (see pp.142-145) gradually catered for the needs of amateur artists, thus freeing the Laing from this responsibility and discharging the pressure for the gallery, which served only as an exhibition platform, without having an active role in the selection process. Ultimately, CBS's death and the consequent change of direction of the gallery further contributed to the conclusion of the whole cycle.

G. THE ACQUISITION OF THE LAING'S MASTERPIECES

The last section in this chapter aims to illustrate the effectiveness of the Laing's acquisition techniques by describing the way in which the main artworks in the collection reached the gallery. The selection of the examples - listed chronologically according to their year of addition to the collection - has been based on two modern sources: the text prepared by Julie Milne, Chief Curator of the Art Galleries, Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums for the catalogue commemorating the Laing's centenary (PCF / Laing Art Gallery, 2004) and the TWAM 'Top Ten' brochure currently distributed to the visitors of the gallery. Significantly, ten of the fifteen works cited by Milne were acquired before 1957, as well as eight of the ten works designated in the 'Top 10' leaflet, thus evidencing the relevance of CBS' contribution to the Laing's collection. Whilst most of these examples came to the Laing as gifts, several of them are today analogous with important artworks that have reached high prices in auctions or belong to the collections of national galleries. Comparisons will be made to such bench-marker artworks when appropriate, in order to evidence the success of the Laing's acquisition policy despite its small budget.

A remark must be made to the fact that, unlike the policy followed with exhibitions, for unascertained reasons the Laing did not have the routine of informing the press of its acquisitions, so there is a scarcity of contemporary press commentaries on public reactions about these acquisitions. The Laing minutes are also sparing in descriptions of motivations underpinning most of the gifts received. The few

contemporary press comments or archival materials available have been written down in each entry.

Sir George Clausen (1852-1944). *The Stone Pickers* (1887)

This example of so-called Rustic Naturalism features the same model as Clausen's *The Girl at the Gate* (1889) - presented to the Tate by the Trustees of the Chantrey Bequest in 1890 - and it was the Laing's first significant purchase.[205] It was acquired while on loan at the Laing's Special Autumn Exhibition of 1907, a display of modern British painting containing examples by Millais, Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), Poynter or John S. Sargent (1856-1925) loaned by public galleries, private collectors and dealers. While arranging the exhibition, CBS stated the difficulties he had 'to trace the present ownership of certain pictures' because 'during the last few years a large number of important collectors have passed away, and many fine collections have been dispersed.'[206] This may have been the case for *The Stone Pickers*. The painting had originally belonged to the Scottish railway engineer and art collector James Staats Forbes, who obtained it through the dealer Goupil in London in 1887. Goupil had purchased the painting for 2,812.50 Francs, and sold it for 3,750 Francs (about £148 at the time).[207] Forbes kept the oil until his death in 1904, when his collection of over four thousand pictures and drawings, valued at over £220,000, started to be sold in parts by his executors in order to prevent the prices from falling by flooding the market with the whole collection.[208] Four hundred selected works were exhibited at the Grafton Galleries in 1905, although it is unclear if *The Stone Pickers* was exhibited there. What is known

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[205] *Tate Gallery Online Catalogue.* 'N.01612, *The Girl at the Gate'.* https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/clausen-the-girl-at-the-gate-n01612.
[206] LCM 26-07-1907. TWA, MD/NC/129/1, p.250.
[207] Goupil Stock book 11, Stock No. 18434, Page 197, Row 14. Getty Provenance Research Tool. https://rosettaapp.getty.edu/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=FL1681335.
[208] Welch, C. (2004). 'Forbes, James Staats' (1823–1904). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/33192

is that it still belonged to the family estate in 1907, when the Laing purchased it for £175 of the £250 total purchasing funds available at that time.[209]

Thomas Cooper Gotch (1854-1931). *Holy Motherhood* (1902)

The Laing's Gotch exhibition of 'Children's Portraits and Child Pictures' (1910) brought to Newcastle sixty examples of the artist's work. Due to a railway strike, this large, altarpiece-like symbolist painting, sent directly by the artist, arrived late, and was also definitely beyond reach for the Laing's budget.[210] Instead, the gallery asked the artist about works similar to the more modest *A Golden Dream* (1893), purchased by the Harris Museum and Art Gallery. Gotch regretted not having anything in that price range, but offered reduced prices for *Holy Motherhood* (£600) and *The Heir to all the Ages* (1897, offered for £250).[211] He tried to persuade CBS by explaining that *Holy Motherhood* represented one year's work and that it was, next to the Tate's *Alleluia* (1896), the most considerable of his creations.[212] Indeed, both artworks share common features (fig.18), and it is interesting that Gotch put them at the same level, as *Alleluia* had been purchased for a National collection under the terms of the Chantrey Bequest, thus meaning much more favourable funding circumstances than those at the Laing. Gotch boasted that his principal works would go to national collections and encouraged the Laing to get one.[213] The Laing Committee acquired the cheapest option (*The Heir to all the ages*), but, after a few months, decided to give it back, and get *Holy Motherhood* instead.[214] T.C. Gotch acknowledged CBS's influence in this change of decision by offering him a preparatory sketch of *Holy Motherhood* as a token of appreciation for his efforts.[215] Indeed, the painting was the most expensive purchase made during CBS' period.

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[209] LCM 08-11-1907. TWA, MD/NC/129/1, p.269. For the painting's provenance, see Foster, M. ed. (1998). *Art treasures of England: the regional collections.* London: Merrell Holberton, p.257.
[210] Anon (22-07-1910). 'A Gotch exhibition at Newcastle.' *Yorkshire Post,* n.p.
[211] Gotch, T.C. (01-08-1910). Letter to CB Stevenson. MSA.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid.
[214]LCM (08-10-1910). TWA, MD.NC/129/2, p.168.
[215] Gotch, T.C. (15-02-1912). Letter to C.B. Stevenson. MSA.

Fig. 18. Left: *Holy Motherhood* (1902, oil on canvas), Laing Art Gallery. Right: *Alleluia* (exh.1896, oil on canvas), Tate Gallery.

Sir William Newenham Montague Orpen, RA (1878-1931). *Portrait of the Artist* (1908)

This intriguing self-portrait was part of the Joicey bequest. Joicey loaned it to the Laing in 1918, together with other paintings by the same artist, although this was the only one finally remaining in the Laing collection. The presence of Orpen's examples in the Joicey collection is somewhat unusual, as he preferred older paintings, more established artists, and archaeological pieces (see pp.51-57).

Orpen painted several realistic and dramatic self-portraits, many of which share with the Laing's example the complex arrangements of space and light. Fourteen of these feature Orpen posing as an artist, with smock, brush and easel, and three of them share a close connection with the Laing's painting (fig.19). Firstly, there is the *Self-portrait with Glasses* (1907) of the Mildura Arts Centre (Australia), part of the art collection of Senator R.D. Elliott, which is an almost identical portrait of the artist wearing the same dressing-gown and glasses. Secondly, *The Painter: Self-portrait with Glasses* (1907, private collection), which was auctioned at Christie's in 2003 for £173,250, is a slightly bigger and more elaborate version of the Mildura portrait.[216] Both versions are probably sketches for the bigger Laing example, painted one year later and featuring exactly the same pose as the two previous versions, although full-length and more detailed, having the self-portrait being reproduced on the canvas on the easel. Finally, the ironically-entitled *Man with Paintbrush* (1925) is a much later version commissioned by the Uffizi in Florence for its *Sala dei Pittori* (1925).[217]

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[216] *Christie's* (2003). 'Important British and Irish Art. Lot 19'. https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/sir-william-orpen-rha-ra-1878-1931-4112677-details.aspx

[217] The Uffizi self-portrait differs in the fact that Orpen's spectacles are pushed up onto the forehead. It also demonstrates a mischievous sense of humour, because the artist's hand emulates a gesture which for Italians is rude and offensive. The Uffizi's invitation was supposedly 'a distinction reserved exclusively for the most famous artists of their time and country', so it is to wonder why Orpen chose this occasion to make a caricature of his previous self-portraits: feasibly, in connection to the historical moment, the artist was scoffing at Italy's fascist regime. See: Konody, P.G. and S. Dark (1932). Sir William Orpen Artist & Man. London: Seeley Service & Co., pp.267-281.

Fig. 19. William Orpen's self-portraits. From left to right and from top to bottom: *Portrait of the Artist* (1908. Oil on canvas. Laing Art Gallery), *Self-portrait with Glasses* (1907. Oil on canvas. Mildura Art Gallery), *The Painter: Self-portrait with Glasses* (1907. Oil on canvas. Private collection) and *Man with Paintbrush* (1925. Oil on canvas. Galleria degli Uffizi).

Dame Laura Knight (1877-1970). *The Beach* (1908)

Another example of work by a living artist, *The Beach* was painted in Newlyn in 1908 and presented at the RA in 1909, where it was a great success. The Laing borrowed it from someone named Harry W. Brooks during a visit to London in early 1919 and exhibited it during the spring.[218] However, when the owner offered it for sale, CBS replied that 'the Committee preferred some other subject' and arranged its return to London.[219] Probably, CBS managed to persuade the members at a later stage, as

the canvas was sent back to Newcastle in June for a further Committee inspection, and then finally purchased in July, for £420 and 'upon the curator's suggestion.'[220] CBS may have had a personal interest in promoting this purchase, as he had been acquainted with Laura and Harold Knight since his youth. The three had first met while studying at the Nottingham School of Art, whilst Laverna Stevenson had later been their pupil:

> Laura, together with Harold Knight taught me "Light and Shade" at the Art School and of course afterwards she and my Husband were in constant collaboration over art matters. He arranged her first exhibition at the house on Lenton Sands, so we seem to have been in touch with her intermittently through life.[221]

CBS enjoyed boasting about this relation, and references to it appeared intermittently in Newcastle's local newspapers: 'Laura Knight is a very old friend of the Curator, and he told me today that he remembered an exhibition of her work when he was in Nottingham and she lived near him'.[222] Maybe because of this connection, CBS made efforts for the Laing to acquire several works of the artist, such as the *The Fair* (1919, purchased in 1925), and *Mary and the Ponies* (1928, purchased in 1933). He also arranged Laura's visit to Newcastle in 1932, where she obtained commissions from Dr. Collingwood Stewart, Lord Kirkley and Councillor

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[218] No details are kept regarding the identity of the owner, although the fact that he lived in the prestigious Kensington Park Gardens suggests he may have been a well-off art collector. E-mail communication with John Croft - nearest living relative to Dame Laura Knight, who is currently working on a catalogue raisonne of the artist – has been unsuccessful, too. Details of the owner's address retrieved from: Laing Art Gallery Curator's letter books 1917-1919. TWA T132-15.
[219] Stevenson, C.B. (15-04-1919). Letter to H.W. Brooks. Laing Art Gallery Curator's letter books 1917-1919. TWA T132-15.
[220] LCM 28-07-1919. T&W Archives, MD/NC/129/3, p244.
[221] Stevenson, L. (n.d.). *Memoirs*. According to text transcribed and digitized by Michael Stevenson, p.24. MSA.
[222] Anon (26-11-1932). 'A box of paints.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.n.

Angus Watson. Then, in 1933, he organised a very popular exhibition of Laura and Harold Knight at the Laing, which triggered discussion in newspapers and division over the merits of the artists' works.[223]

J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851). *Dinant sur Meuse from the North-West* (1839)

This is another example of an artwork secured whilst exhibited at the Laing, where it had been sent on loan by the dealers T. Agnew & Sons for the Turner exhibition held at the gallery in 1924.[224] However, the purchase did not take place then, and *Dinant sur Meuse* was returned to Agnew's in London at the end of February 1925, only to be purchased one month later directly from the dealer's showroom. The reason for this atypical behaviour is connected to the reception, at that time, of the Wigham Richardson Fund, which would provide the funding for the purchase.[225] Therefore, *Dinant sur Meuse* became the first, and also one of the most expensive, watercolour acquired through this fund, being finally purchased for £260, although reduced from the 350 guineas initially requested by the dealer. The substantial discount on the original price was achieved through the intermediation of the Committee member Percy Corder, who had taken a personal interest in the arrangement of the exhibition, even lending his own example of the 'Notes' by Ruskin to be displayed at the Laing.[226] The presence of Ruskin's book in the exhibition is not accidental, as *Dinant sur Meuse* was mentioned in it, thus emphasizing that the watercolour had once belonged to the Victorian art critic. Indeed, it had been displayed at the1878 exhibition of Turner drawings owned by Ruskin, who had highlighted 'how absolutely determined Turner's execution was, leaving the grey of warm tinted paper entirely

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[223] The Laura and Harold Knight exhibition held at the Laing in 1933 was very popular, attracting over 27,000 visitors. CBS' curatorial work was praised in the following terms: 'There must have been great labour involved in seeking these examples from distant homes and private collections', and 'there is not a notable work of either artist which has not been secured on loan for this display.' However, not everyone liked the exhibition: Laura's paintings were described as 'obviously pandering to the bawdy, garish, sentimental and superficial "taste" of the English lower classes, whilst Harold's were considered sentimental, representational and 'bourgeois banalities.' See: Anon (08-04-1933). 'Newcastle's Finest Art exhibition.' *Northern Echo*, n.p. and 'The Blue Burb' (18-04-1933). 'Pictures that stuck in the Dame Laura Knight exhibition'. *Evening Chronicle*, n.p.

[224] LCM 26-09-1924. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.470.

[225] LCM 27-02-1925. TWA MD/NC/129/3, p.495.

[226] Curator's letters books 1915-1934. TWA T.132/20, p.130

untouched for part of his ground colour. This Dinant is a study of the highest quality, the rock drawing under the fort insuperable.'[227] Ruskin had purchased the painting from Hannah Cooper, niece and inheritor of Charles Stokes, who had bought it from the agent Thomas Griffith in 1850. After Ruskin's death, *Dinant* was bequeathed to Arthur Severn, who sold the painting to Agnew.[228]

To fully understand the significance of this acquisition for the Laing collection, it is worth mentioning the fate of other five 'sibling examples' of the painting, created during the same tour of the rivers Meuse and Mosel and on pieces torn from the same sheet of blue-grey paper (fig. 20): four of them were donated to the nation as part of the Turner Bequest (1856) and are kept at the Tate, whilst *View of Givet, on The Meuse, South of Dinant* (1839) was auctioned by Sotheby's in 2008, reaching £115,250.[229]

Duncan J.C. Grant (**1885-1978). *The Hammock* (1921-1923)**

During CBS' years, the Laing received thirty-six paintings from the Contemporary Art Society (CAS). The gallery joined the fund in 1927, obtaining its first gift (*The Unshaved Man* (1922-3), by Allan Gwynne-Jones, 1892-1982) that same year. The CAS, which purchased artworks produced in the previous twenty years to be exhibited by and donated to public collections, has often been charged with a bias towards the Bloomsbury group, due to the influence exerted by founding members like Roger Fry and D.S. MacColl.[230] The CAS' donations to the Laing seem to reflect this bias, as the gallery received several examples by Bloomsbury artists, including two pieces by Duncan Grant: *The Hammock,* presented in 1935, and the watercolour *Nude with Violin* (n.d.), gifted in 1946.

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[227] Ruskin, J. (1878). *Notes by Mr. Ruskin: Part I. On His Drawings by the Late J. M. W. Turner, R.A.* London: Chiswick Press, p.450.
[228] Powell, C. (1991). *Turner's rivers of Europe: the Rhine, Meuse and Mosel*. London: Tate Gallery Publications, p.161.
[229] *Sotheby's* (2008). 'Early British drawings, watercolours and portrait miniatures, Lot 180.' http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2008/early-british-drawings-watercolours-and-portrait-miniatures-l08171/lot.180.html.
[230] Bowness, A. et al. (1991). *British Contemporary Art 1910-1990. Eighty years of collecting by the Contemporary Art Society.* Herbert Press, London.

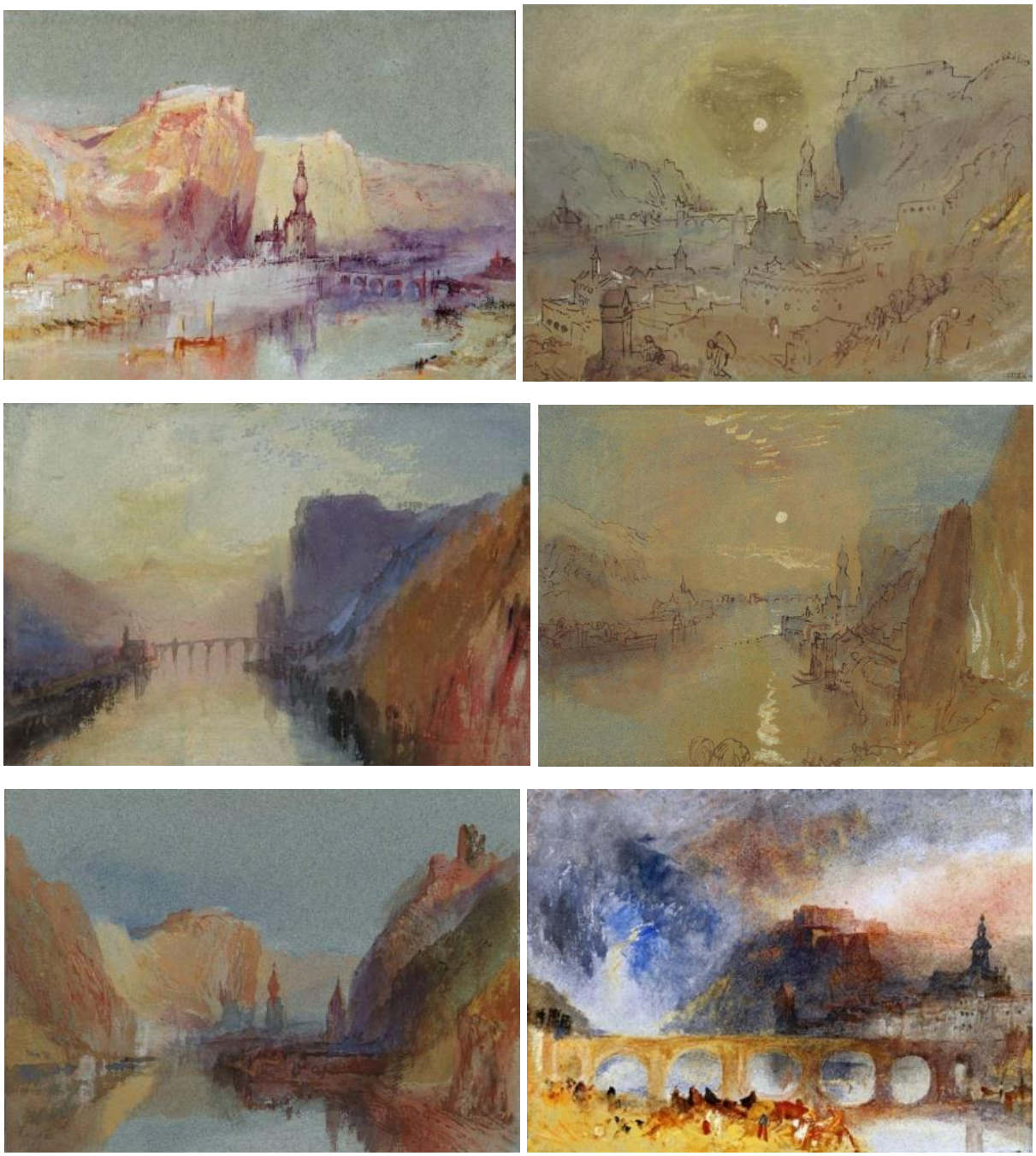

Fig.20. Turner's watercolours of Dinant painted in 1839. From left to right and from top to bottom: *Dinant on the Meuse from the North-West* (Laing Art Gallery). *Dinant from the South-East: Evening; Dinant on the Meuse from the South; Dinant from the Roche à Bayard: Moonlight* and *Dinant, Bouvignes and Crèvecoeur: Sunset* (Tate). *View of Givet on The Meuse, South of Dinant* (private collection).

CBS chose *The Hammock* personally on a visit to London. It had been painted by a young Grant who had just had his first solo show (Carfax Gallery, 1920), but CBS was probably aware of Grant's rising popularity, because the canvas had received critical acclaim when exhibited in Grant's second solo exhibition at the Independent Gallery (London, 1923). Shortly after, its photograph was included in Roger Fry's book on the artist (Hogarth Press, 1924), thus motivating its purchase by Samuel Courtauld (1876-1947), who presented it to the CAS in 1928.[231] During his lifetime, Grant kept for himself a studio version of the painting - known as *The Hammock, Charleston*, and distinguishable by a slight repositioning of the figure of Duncan's little daughter Angelica (fig. 21). This second version was purchased at some unrecorded point by the dealer Anthony d'Offay and then sold to a private collector, who offered it for auction in 2008, going under the hammer for £37,250.[232]

The Laing's relation with the CAS was uncommonly fruitful in 1935, as the gallery had already received two other gifts earlier that year: Geoffrey Nelson's *Vieux Cagnes* (1927) and Lady Sylvia Gosse's *Dieppe, La Place Nationale* (1935 ca.), thus evidencing CBS' effectiveness when it came to negotiating with charitable art institutions.

Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912). *Love in Idleness* (c.1891)

This neo-classicist painting, whose original title was *Love Votaries,* was first exhibited at the New Gallery, in London, in 1891, and then purchased by Sir Edward M. Denny in 1900, who bequeathed it to his wife in 1913.[233] Alma-Tadema enjoyed continued success during his lifetime, being one of the wealthiest painters of the nineteenth century, and many of his 'Marbellous!' paintings – as the magazine *Punch* nicknamed them – were directly commissioned from the artist by high-profile dealers such as Ernest Gambart and Arthur Tooth & Sons, who made huge profits

[231] Watney, S. (1990). *The Art of Duncan Grant*. London: John Murray Publishers Ltd.
[232] *Christie's* (2008) 'Sale 5391. 20th Century British Art including Works from the Collection of Bannon & Barnabas McHenry.' https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/duncan-grant-1885-1978-the-hammock-charleston-5164818-details.aspx.
[233] Swanson, V.G. (1990). *The biography and catalogue raisonne of the paintings of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema*. London: Garton&Co., p.244.

Fig.21.Duncan Grant's versions of *The Hammock* (1921, oil on canvas). Private collection (above) and Laing Art Gallery (below).

from their purchases, often by selling them on to rich American collectors.[234]

Although - due to the changes in art tastes during the early twentieth century - Alma-Tadema's reputation slowly fell into decline after his death, *Love Votaries* was still fashionable in 1925, as is evidenced by the fact that it was reproduced in *The Connoisseur,* being sold at Christie's for £1,050 one month later.[235] The buyer wasthe Newcastle-born 'ring dealer' W.W. Sampson. Maybe because of having seen it at *The Connoisseur,* or maybe because of an acquaintance with Sampson, the Laing Committee member G.E. Henderson purchased the canvas.[236] After several donations during his membership, Henderson bequeathed the Laing with the remainder of his personal collection on loan at the gallery, which amounted to 117 artworks. *Love in Idleness* was included in that bequest, thus suggesting that the painting had been part of the Laing's policy of encouraging long-term loans from its most frequent benefactors. In 1954, CBS still considered Henderson's collection as one of the most important gifts ever received by the Laing, despite Alma-Tadema's works not regaining popularity until the late 1960s.[237] Nonetheless, from the 1970s his paintings experienced a progressive rise in auction prices, which still continues today.[238] As an example, Alma-Tadema's *The Finding of Moses* (1904), which had originally been commissioned for 5,000 guinea, fetched only £252 in 1960, but was auctioned again in 2010 for nearly thirty-six million dollars.[239]

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[234] Anon (01-06-1881). 'Collated opinion'. *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture* (vol.II). London: William Reeves, p.172.
[235] Op. cit. note 231.
[236] George Edward Henderson was an urban utilities owner and amateur collector, who became one of the earliest donors to the Laing with the offering, in 1905, of Harold Knight's *A Cornfield in Holland* (1904). Further donations from him followed in 1906, 1912, 1913, 1920, 1925 and 1928, culminating in the gift, in commemoration of his ninetieth birthday in 1934, of sixty-seven paintings that at the moment he had on loan at the Laing, with the condition that they would be they would be labelled with his name, and also kept on the walls and not stored away. NCR 02-02-1934, p.663. For more details regarding Henderson's Bequest, see p.95.
[237] Op. cit. note 96, p.9.
[238] The rise in prices of Victorian artworks started in the 1970s has been linked to the influence of the poet and journalist John Betjeman (1906-1984). See: Hillier, B. (2006). *Betjeman: the biography*. London: John Murray.
[239] Reitlinger, G. (1961). *The Economics of Taste.* London: Barrie Books, p.244. For the 2010 auction, see: *Sotheby's* (2010). '19th Century European Art.' http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2010/19th-century-european-art-n08673/lot.56.html.

Charles William Mitchell (1855-1903). *Hypatia* (1885)

The acquisition of this historicist Victorian painting is a good example of the profitable use that the early Laing made from the combination of long-term loans and collectors' personal circumstances. C.W. Mitchell was the only son of the Newcastle shipbuilder Charles Mitchell, who used part of his fortune to ensure the success of Mitchell Jr's artistic career, funding different art clubs (such as the Pen and Palette Club) and even commissioning St George's church, in Jesmond (1888), whose stained glass and mosaic figures were designed by his son.[240]

Mitchell Jr, who had been born just after the dissolution of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, inherited some of the group's stylistic features. He exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery, and *Hypatia* was elected Picture of the year in the RA exhibition of 1885. However, his early death stopped the fulfillment of his career, and critics and historians have tended to consider his work as too imitative of that of John William Waterhouse (1849-1917): indeed, Waterhouse's *Eulalia* – also exhibited at the RA in 1885 – evidences a shared inclination to voyeurism and to neo-classical settings, besides a common subject of martyrized heroines (fig.22).[241]

Nevertheless, Mitchell Jr remained significant for Newcastle, both as an artist and as an early promoter of the need for a public art gallery. For these reasons, when - after Mrs. Mitchell's death in 1926 - the family auctioned the artworks stored in Jesmond Towers, Alderman Robinson (the Laing Chairman at that time) and the Committee member Major R. Temperley took advantage of the situation to ask for *Hypatia*'s loan.[242] The gallery displayed the painting for over fifteen years, until 1940, when Charles Mitchell - the artist's grandson - was elected Mayor of Newcastle and persuaded by the Laing to donate *Hypatia* to the city.

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[240] Moat, N. (2011). *A Theatre for the Soul: St George's Church, Jesmond: The Building and Cultural Reception of a late-Victorian Church.* (Doctoral Thesis, Newcastle University, Newcastle, U.K.). Retrieved from https://theses.ncl.ac.uk/dspace/bitstream/10443/1345/1/Moat%2011%20v.1.pdf

[241] Goldhill, S. (2011). *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity: Art, Opera, Fiction, and the Proclamation of Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p.30-32.

[242] LCM 24-09-1926. TWA, MD/NC/129/3, p.583.

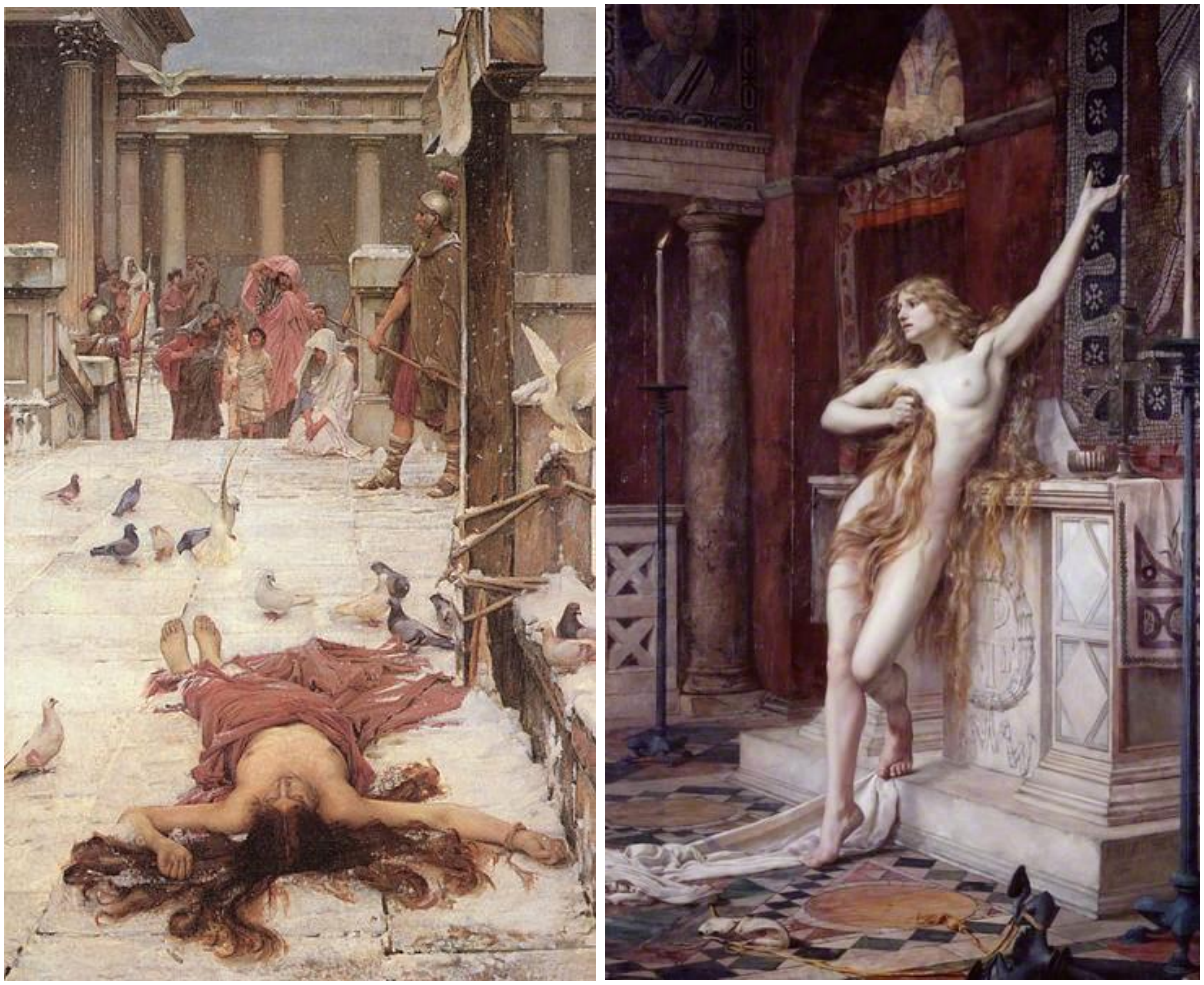

Fig.22. John William Waterhouse, *Eulalia* (exh.1885. Oil on canvas. Tate Gallery) and Charles William Mitchell, *Hypatia* (1885. Oil on canvas. Laing Art Gallery).

Sir Edward John Poynter (1836-1919). *The Catapult* (1868)

This nineteenth-century historical genre painting was exhibited both in the RA Summer Exhibition and in the Autumn Exhibition of the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists of 1868, where it was priced at £577.10.0.[243] However, it was not sold then, and Poynter continued working on it at least until 1872.[244] Whilst in the artist's studio, it was purchased by the North-Eastern Quaker Sir Joseph Whitwell Pease (1828-1903), a banker, mine-owner and art collector who was probably attracted to the engineering aspects of the subject.[245] Toward the end of his life, Pease's businesses failed, and in 1903 his collection was auctioned at Christie's in London. *The Catapult* was then purchased by the Newcastle shipowner Walter Runciman (1870-1949), who had probably been acquainted with the painting in the North-East.[246]

Although *The Catapult* provided Poynter with the definitive consolidation of his reputation, opening to him the doors of the RA, his work - similarly to other nineteenth-century artists in the Laing collection, like John Martin, Alma-Tadema, or C.W. Mitchell - was not in tune with the aesthetic shift of the early twentieth century, and his fame declined after his death.[247] Therefore, when Walter Runciman donated *The Catapult* to the Laing in 1945, it did not cause a great amount of interest, and local press, busy reporting more urgent matters in that end-of-war period, did not mention it.[248] Interestingly, many of the late-Victorian artistic choices of the North-Eastern industrialists arrived to the Laing in the 1940s and 1950s, when their authors' popularity - and subsequently their prices in auctions - were at their lowest.

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[243] Hopkinson, M. *The Catapult.* TWA. https://collectionssearchtwmuseums.org.uk/#details=ecatalogue.299634.
[244] Wood, C. (1983). *Olympian dreamers: Victorian classical painters, 1860-1914.* London: Constable.
[245] Frederick, M.S. (2006) 'A Quaker collects: Joseph Whitwell Pease of Darlington.' *Journal of the History of Collections*, Volume 18, Issue 1, pp.59–69. https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhi039.
[246] Walter Runciman, 1st Viscount Runciman of Doxford, was a Liberal and later National Liberal MP and government minister, although he was better known in Newcastle because of the family's ship-owning business.
[247] Smith, A. (1996). *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality, and Art*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.IX.
[248] LCM 29-06-1945. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.12.

Paul Gauguin (1848-1903). *The Breton Shepherdess* (1886)

This Post-Impressionist landscape arrived at the Laing barely two months after *The Catapult,* although in very different circumstances. It was chosen for the Laing by Philip James (1902-1974), Art Director of the recently created Arts Council from a collection of twenty-seven French and English Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works bequeathed to the Art Fund by Mrs. D.M. Fulford, which were distributed to seventeen different public collections.[249]

Gaugin sold *The Breton Shepherdess* to the painter Léon Fauché in 1890 for 150 French Francs (equivalent to £5.9 of the time) who then sold it to Gauguin's friend and fellow artist Gustave Fayet (1865-1925) in 1903.[250] After unsuccessfully trying to sell it, Fauyet kept the painting until his death, when it was purchased by Paul Rosenberg (1881-1959) the famous French dealer representing Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque and Henri Matisse, from whom it was purchased by Mrs Fulford. The transaction probably took place through the dealer's London branch, as by the end of the 1930s Rosenberg had started moving his collection of what the Nazis considered 'degenerate art' out of continental Europe to London, United States, Australia and South America.

The Laing Minutes of the Second World War period are incomplete, and the Committee meetings were still being held at irregular intervals, so no information has been kept regarding the gallery's reactions to the gift. It is unclear whether they would have preferred a British artwork (like Mrs. Fulford's gift of a painting by Duncan Grant to the Bristol Art Gallery, or the work by Alfred Sisley she gave to the Leeds Art Gallery), or if instead, CBS, who had on other occasions asked Philip James at the Art Fund for specific paintings, had asked for a foreign artwork purposefully, coinciding with the latest stage of his curatorial career, in which he was concerned about the significance and impact of the Laing collection.

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[249] *The National Inventory for Continental European Paintings. VADS*. 'Paul Gauguin, *The Breton Shepherdess*.' https://vads.ac.uk/large.php?uid=86472&sos=0

[250] Wildenstein, D. (2002). *Gauguin: a savage in the making: catalogue raisonn of the paintings* (1873-1888). Milano: Skira. The FF-£ conversion has been calculated through a historical currency converter. https://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html

Sir Stanley Spencer (1891-1959). *The Lovers* (1934)

Another of CBS' concerns in his last years was the 'modernisation' of the Laing collection in order to cover more recent periods of the history of British art. In 1948, he argued that 'some representative pictures of modern painting should be acquired, so that the Laing Art Gallery should not lag behind the great Galleries in the country. Moreover, many students and connoisseurs of art had asked that modern paintings might be included in the collections at the gallery.'[251] The request was effective, and the Laing Committee purchased five works from living or recently deceased artists: *Yellow Tulips and Statuette* (c.1912-1927), by S.J. Peploe, (1871-1935), purchased from Reid and Lefevre Ltd for £225; *Still Life with fish* (1948), purchased from the artist, Ruskin Spear (1911-1990) for £70, *Le Havre* (1939, £130 paid) and *Marine Set* (1936, £100 paid), both bought direct from the artist, Edward Wadsworth (1889–1949), and finally, *The Lovers,* which was the most expensive of the group, purchased from Arthur Tooth and Sons for £450.

As an acquisition, *The Lovers* implied a certain risk, as the painting had been one of the two rejected by the RA for display at the Summer Exhibition in 1935 on the grounds of obscenity - Spencer himself had described the scene as, 'watching and experiencing the inside of a sexual experience' - the matter having led to the artist's resignation from the RA.[252] The Laing's lack of prejudices, however, proved to be wise, as Spencer re-joined the RA in the 1950s, and from then on his standing continued to grow. In 1955, the Tate dedicated a retrospective to him, and in 1959, he received a knighthood. This trend has continued to present times, as can be evidenced by the prices fetched by the auction of another of Spencer's 'Cookham scenes', the oil painting *Sunflower and Dog Worship* (1937) at Sotheby's in 2011 for £5.4 million.[253]

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[251] LCM 23-01-1948. TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.84.
[252] MacCarthy, F. (1997). *Stanley Spencer: An English Vision. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden*. Centro Cultural / Arte Contemporáneo (Mexico City), British Council. Yale University Press.
[253] Anon (16-11-2011).' Stanley Spencer painting sells for £5.4m.' BBC News. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-13789029.

John Martin (1789-1854). *The Bard* (c.1817)

This is a further example of the Laing's technique of direct purchase of artworks whilst on display at the gallery. Exhibited at the RA in 1817, *The Bard* marked the beginning of John Martin's success, although he was never fully accepted as a member. Furthermore, the artist's popularity quickly faded due to mid-Victorian changes in taste, and his artworks completely lost their market value after being lambasted by John Ruskin in 1879.[254] As H. Beck (1973) explains,

> Martin could not be judged by Ruskinian standards of truth to nature and could not be accepted by anyone under Ruskin's influence, neither could he be taken seriously by the painters of modern life or any of the Classic Revivalists. He was subsequently quite unacceptable to the protagonists of the Aesthetic Movement, and out of tune with the *fin de siècle*, which explains why, when his reputation died in the early 1870s, he was forgotten for about seventy years, until he could be reviewed with the twentieth century understanding of surrealism and disregard for high moral purpose.[255]

After Martin's death, his family kept the artist's unsold works and unsuccessfully tried to auction them. By the 1920s, many of Martin's pieces had been rolled up and stored in warehouses, being forgotten until the decisive arrival to the UK, in the 1940s, of Charlotte (1900-n.d.) and Robert Frank (1886-1953), refugees from Nazi Germany and uncle and aunt of diarist Anne Frank, who set up as dealers in London, specializing in Victorian art. From them, the Tate purchased *The Great Day of his Wrath* (1851-53) in 1945, starting the wave of Martin's revival which influenced the Laing's decision to hold a large retrospective exhibition of the artist in the regionalist pride context of the Festival of Britain (1951). *The Bard* was loaned by the Franks for this exhibition, attracting CBS' interest, who described it to the Committee as 'one of the most characteristic of Martin's work', and 'an outstanding feature, both for its masterly skill in execution and also for its charms of colour and composition'.[256] He remarked that this was the only work that Robert Frank had for sale at the moment, and that its price (£250), 'in view of the soaring prices of Martin's

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[254] The art critic scorned Martin as a mere 'workman' bent on 'reckless accumulation of false magnitude.' See: Balston, T. (1947) *John Martin, 1789-1854: His Life and Works.* London: Gerald Duckworth, pp. 182, 215.
[255] Beck, H. (1973). *Victorian Engravings.* Victoria & Albert Museum: London.
[256] Stevenson, CB. (1951) 'Festival of Britain Exhibition Report.' TWA, MD/NC/129/6, p.168.

work, is most reasonable'.[257] Indeed, whilst in earlier times the Laing had been able to purchase Martin's works from private local collections very affordably (*Landscape, Classical Composition* had been purchased in 1928 for £2.2, and *Marcus Curtius* was bought in 1935 as part of a lot containing twelve paintings by local artists, costing £50 in total), the prices of Martin's paintings slightly increased in the 1950s, with minor gouaches such as *The Destruction of Pharaoh's Host* (1836) selling for £147 in 1954 and *The Valley of Desolation* (n.d.) reaching £210 in 1957.[258]

The Laing's financial situation was especially weak after the extraordinary costs involved in the transportation of Martin's huge works for the exhibition, with the balance sheets showing £240 of over-expenditure, so CBS had to be very persuasive. He appealed to the fame that the painting would bring to the Laing, by explaining that *The Bard* had been reproduced in the catalogue of the RA Winter exhibition 'The First Hundred Years of the RA' and in *The Illustrated London News*. Besides, the RA had requested the loan of the work from Robert Frank for the aforementioned exhibition, so 'if the picture is purchased this afternoon it will be included in the RA Exhibition under the ownership of this Committee.'[259] But CBS' definitive argument was that, 'being desirous of adding this work to the collections I enquired whether the National-Art Collections Fund would assist in the purchase and I was able to get a grant from the Committee of the National-Art Collections Fund of £125.'[260] This meant that the Laing could finally obtain the painting for half of its sale price, the purchase being praised by the local media, taking regional pride in the fact that '*The Bard* comes home'.[261]

John Martin (1789-1854). *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* (c.1852)

Besides the aforementioned examples, the Laing's collection of Martin's works - the largest held by any art gallery - has other examples acquired during CBS' tenure, such as *Canute Rebuking the Flattery of his Courtiers* (1842, purchased in 1910),

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[257] Ibid.
[258] Reitlinger, G. (1961). *The Economics of Taste*. London: Barrie Books, p.382.
[259] Op. cit. note 254.
[260] Op. cit. note 254.
[261] Anon (30-11-1951). 'Laing Art Gallery buys Martin's famous painting.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

Arthur and Aegle in the Happy Valley (1849, donated in 1951), and *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah*. According to CBS, who described this huge apocalyptical painting as 'one of the finest examples of Martin's work', which 'will make a very valuable addition to the Gallery collections', *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* was first exhibited at the RA in 1852, being the last of Martin's paintings displayed there during the artist's lifetime.[262] Martin may have repeated in it the subject of an earlier version, sold in 1832, under the title *The Burning of Sodom.*[263] The same subject appears again in a drawing sold in 1833, and in two prints dated in 1838 and 1839, which already hold the title *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,* thus showing the artist's long engagement with terrifying biblical stories.[264]

The canvas is another example of donation following a long-term loan by a local magnate. In this case the owner was the shipbroker, coal exporter and former Mayor of Newcastle, Alderman J.F. Weidner (1854-1934), who first loaned *Sodom and Gomorrah* to the Laing in 1929.[265] Its display triggered a wave of interest in the painter, and letters to the newspaper proposed a Martin exhibition, named other local collectors holding further examples by the artist, and complained that these artworks were 'not appreciated as they should be.'[266] The painting seems to have stayed at the gallery after Weidner's death, as it was still mentioned as on loan in 1934.[267] Then, in 1948, a newspaper report mentions the display at the Laing of a painting whose title is not recounted, but which shows 'the wholesale destruction by fire of an ancient city, from which the inhabitants are fleeing, carrying with them their household treasures.'[268] The same article states that this painting was 'a replica of that sold last month at Christie's for 155 guineas', a comment that may refer to Martin's aforementioned earlier version. However, it was not until 1951 that - after having been displayed at the Festival of Britain Exhibition - *The Destruction of*

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[262] Op. cit. note 254.
[263] *The Getty Provenance Index* 'Databases. Sales Catalogs searching tool.' https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance/search.html
[264] TWAM Catalogue. TWCMS E8138 and TWCMS E8122.
[265] LCM 25-10-1929. TWA, MD/NC/129/4, p.80.
[266] Richardson, W.P. (15-01-1930). 'John Martin's pictures'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[267] Anon (23-02-1934). 'North Monster recalled'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[268] Anon (13-04-1948). Awe-inspiring. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

Sodom and Gomorrah was permanently donated to the Laing. The donors were E.F. Weidner (one of the shipowner's sons) and his co-trustees, who declared as their motivations 'to record their appreciation of the Festival of Britain Exhibition', and to honour 'the memory of the late Alderman J.F. Weidner.'[269] Therefore, as in the previous example, its donation is connected with the opportunities arising because of the Martin exhibition in the context of the Festival of Britain.

William Holman Hunt (1827-1910). *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (1868)

Probably the most famous artwork in the Laing collection, *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* is also the artwork which was there on loan for the longest time before its acquisition. This large portrait was one of the few non-religious paintings created by the pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt. The dealer Ernest Gambart bought it - and the smaller sketch version, discussed below - in 1867, before they were finished, paying £2,205 for both, and exhibiting the largest version at his London gallery in 1868.[270] Two years later, it was bought by James Hall (1826-1904), of Tynemouth, a partner in the ship-owning business Palmer, Hall & Co.[271] The purchase was discussed by Bell Scott in a letter to Leathart: 'It seems to me truly surprising that anyone I never heard of should exist in Newcastle willing to give £2,000 for a picture'.[272] Actually, the purchaser had paid £1,550, but this sum was later exaggerated, first by local gossip, and later also by CBS – something that he had a tendency to do – who wrote that Hall had paid £2,650.[273]

Despite Bell Scott not knowing Hall, the ship-owner's interest in art is evidenced by the fact that he lent *Isabella* to different exhibitions (Glasgow 1870, Newcastle 1870, Fine Arts Society 1886, Guildhall 1890, and Birmingham 1891) before his death. His son, Dr Wilfred Hall (1874-1952), continued the initiative, lending the painting to the

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[269] Op. cit. note 254.
[270] Bronkhurst, J. (2006). *William Holman Hunt: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Vol. 1). Yale University Press, p.207.
[271] *Durham Mining Museum Online Archive.* 'James Hall obituary.' http://www.dmm.org.uk/archives/a_obit12.htm.
[272] Maas, J. (1975). *Gambart: Prince of the Victorian Art World.* London: Barrie & Jenkins, p.216.
[273] Stevenson, C.B. (24-01-1935). 'Tragedy did not end with the paintings of this grim masterpiece.' *Daily Express,* n.p. For more details about Bell Scott and Leathart's role in Victorian Newcastle arts scene, see pp.18-29.

New Walk (Leicester) and Manchester galleries in 1906, and then to Walker Art Gallery, in Liverpool, in 1907 - which unsuccessfully attempted to purchase it – before the decisive loan to the Laing between 1907 and 1953. W. Hall, who had opportunistically been made a member of the Laing Committee in 1922, died in 1952, bequeathing four Greek vases to the Laing, but not *Isabella.*[274] The painting was instead taken to Christie's by Hall's executors, where the auction failed to reach the minimum of £100 requested, thus evidencing the drastic changes in taste occurring in less than fifty years.[275] Feasibly, after this failure, a Laing representative met Hall's executors and convinced them that, in view of the low market value of the painting and of Hall's longtime connection with the Laing, its donation would be a suitable option, something that finally took place in 1953.

Evidence of the art market's unpredictability is provided by the story of *Isabella'*s smaller replica (fig.23), which was initially created to serve as a model for the Laing's version, and which was partly painted by the copyist Gallicot, being finished by Hunt and purchased by Gambart, together with the larger version. The copy was exported to the U.S. in 1871 where it was purchased by the dealer Samuel P. Avery. After passing through different owners over time, in June 2014 the smaller *Isabella* was put for sale by the Delaware Art Museum, reaching the auction price of £2,882,500, thus proving that, again in just half a century, the conceptions of taste and artistic value had undergone a further shift. [276]

Conclusion

The systematic application of the policies and methods described in this chapter resulted in the successful acquisition of the Laing's permanent collection. In little over fifty years, the gallery went from being an empty building to containing artworks worth about £250,000 by the standards of 1957, including one of the best provincial

[274] Anon (06-12-1952). £108,398 'Tynemouth will.' *Northern Echo,* n.p.
[275] Op. cit. note 268.
[276] *Christie's* (2014). 'Sale 1545. Victorian, Pre-Raphaelite & British Impressionist Art.' https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/william-holman-hunt-om-rws-1827-1910-5807488-details.aspx.

Fig. 23. William Holman Hunt, *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (1868. Oil on canvas). Laing Art Gallery (left) and private collection (right).

collections of watercolours, with over a thousand examples.[277] Also remarkable was the continued success of the Northern Counties exhibitions for over fifty years, which allowed the purchase of about a hundred examples of Northern contemporary art at optimal market conditions for the gallery.

The seventy years that have passed since CBS' death provide the necessary space for reflection upon the matter of cultural relativism and the ability of artistic reputations to survive changes in critical perceptions and fashions and remain popular with the public. Of course, no art expert is an oracle, and the purchases of contemporary art undertaken by the early Laing were often risky bets. Some of the pieces in the collection have inevitably 'gone out of fashion' or lost the value assigned to them in their day. Also, important changes have taken place in the attribution of some of the artworks which were the most valued in the early days of the Laing. Two examples are J.M.W. Turner's *Tivoli with the Temple of the Sibyl* (1795-1810), whose authorship is today not confirmed (see p.103), or *Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Grounds* (n.d.) donated by F.J. Nettlefold in 1947, which CBS considered as one of the greatest achievements of his career, but whose attribution to Constable was discarded in the 1970s.[278]

However, what CBS perceived as the major shortcoming of his career was the historical oil section. Although by the end of the curator's life it included several works of the old masters of the British School, plus a small selection of Italian, Flemish, Dutch and French painting, CBS regretted that it was still incomplete, lacking further eighteenth-century artists such as Reynolds, Gainsborough, Romney and Turner to provide it with 'its full educational importance.'[279] Although in his last years the curator was able to secure Richard Wilson's (1713-1782) *The Alban Hills* (c.1751, purchased in 1954 for £500), even in the 1950s the best artworks continued to be attainable only through gifts. Press comments agreed on where the gaps in the oil collection existed and how this was the biggest challenge to the future purchasing

[277] Anon (05-09-1957). '£250,000 in art'. *Newcastle Journal,* n.p.
[278] Courtauld List 1971 neg.no. B71/1085; Hoozee 1979 no.682 illust. as not by Constable; List 2004 inv. n.B8117 as after.
[279] Stevenson C.B. (28-02-1955). Draft notes about the oil collection. TWA, T132/62.

policy, stating that they covered 'barely two centuries and those most unevenly.'[280] The lack of sculpture, abstract works and foreign artists was also criticised:

> The Laing Gallery must be the chief gateway to the world of art for more than 1,000,000 people living in or around Newcastle. To pretend that they can achieve cultural maturity on an artistic diet limited to British pictures is as foolish as to expect them to appreciate all the pleasures of eating on a physical diet consisting only on roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. We must no longer be satisfied to make good this dietary deficiency by occasional injections from loan exhibitions. Civic pride alone should make Newcastle unwilling to accept continued inferiority to York and Leeds, but pride must be paid for.[281]

Nevertheless, there was an extended awareness that the root of this problem was the insufficient public purchasing fund they received. The proposal raised after CBS' death that as a memorial 'to its distinguished servant', Newcastle should 'treble the purchasing grant available to the son who has succeeded him' went unheard, thus confirming the issue.[282]

On the positive side, the dependence of the Laing's collection on donations helps us to trace the tastes and decisions of the donors who made that collection possible and who contributed to shape public taste through their personal choices. Whilst Newcastle industrial elites had not initially considered the Laing as a suitable institution to receive their art collections, those donations finally arrived - in dribs and drabs and often through the owners' descendants - during CBS' last years. Indeed, the road taken by those donors was not straightforward, and the arrival of many of their art treasures was so late that they reached the gallery only at a time when the mainstream opinion considered them out of fashion.

Nevertheless, shifts in taste can happen again and again, and in what was actually a providential turn for the Laing, this little regional gallery ended up with a remarkable collection of nineteenth-century British painting and a handful of very uncommon artworks belonging to different periods and countries, plus a famous watercolour collection and an accurate selection of contemporary pieces obtained at reduced prices. Some of these artworks are comparable to those held by major national and

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[280] Geffen, I. (07-08-1956). 'City gallery should provide less limited art diet.' *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Geffen, I. (03-10-1957). 'Exhibition memorial to curator'. *Evening Chronicle,* n.p.

international galleries, or to those sold at significant prices at auction houses today. There is a moral that small museums can extract from this story, and it is that the mixture of effort, enthusiasm and good use of opportunities and circumstances can be as effective as money in the achievement of a first-rate collection. It can be argued that the Laing's policy was based on financial considerations and that it was not the product of a deliberate aesthetic choice. Nevertheless, this circumstance can also be seen not as a defect, but as a conditioning that made the achievement even more laudable, because it resulted in a comprehensive and coherent permanent collection.

CONCLUSION

> Municipal museums were popular places, with large numbers of visitors; but they were also quite fragile, chronically and sometimes acutely short of resources, struggling to achieve a professional staff base, and dependent on the whims of a small number of councillors and donors.[1]

The Laing - the first public art gallery in Newcastle - is today the flagship art venue of Tyne and Wear Museums. It is an active and committed institution playing a seminal role in the cultural identity of the inhabitants of the North-East. For the first time, this research has analysed the gallery's early history across a large timescale, reflecting upon the original aims guiding its first policy, the mechanisms followed for the creation and management of its permanent collection and the significance of its early exhibitions. The data obtained has been connected with the career of the Laing's first curators, with its historic and social context – both locally and nationally - and with the wider background of British provincial museums in the first half of the twentieth century. Hopefully, this study will provide the institution and its audiences with a more solid understanding of the Laing's significance and place with museum history.

Outcome

Although recent scholarship is increasingly playing attention to the history of British museums, the monographic study of municipal art galleries is still in its infancy. This thesis has contributed to filling the gap in extant scholarship by offering a new understanding of the consequences of historical events in the daily management of the Laing and in its collecting strategies, demonstrating that the story of this gallery is integrally linked to the creation of its collection.[2] The research has also given an

[1] Hill, K. (2005). *Culture and Class in English Public Museums, 1850-1914*. Aldershot: Ashgate, p.1.

[2] From a current point of view, the early Laing's insistence in achieving a permanent collection can be difficult to understand, as nowadays museums of modern art tend to favour 'Kunsthalle' systems, which allow flexibility of space for temporary exhibitions, whilst the money saved from purchases can be used to fund educational activities or to cover the loans' insurance and transportation costs. However, by the beginning of the twentieth century this kind of system was very unusual, with the Whitechapel Gallery acting as one of the few examples. The Laing, like most regional art galleries, and following the late-Victorian wave of civic pride, aimed to obtain a permanent collection which acted as an element of status and prestige for

insight into the career and the motivations of the Laing's first curator and committee members, uncovering the centrality of the gallery's educational aims and of the struggles caused by financial issues. Moreover, it has thoroughly analysed the mechanisms used to build the permanent collection and the strategies employed to overcome Newcastle's peripherality and to enhance the interaction with donors, audiences, other public art galleries, dealers and artists. The sometimes troublesome dialogue with local political structures and the ultimate aim of guaranteeing access to art education for the people of the North-East have become central elements in this narrative too.

The main research questions regarded the Laing's particularities: its late opening and the absence of both a nucleus collection and of the funds needed to purchase it. The search of answers has necessarily linked the outcome with the idiosyncrasy of local donors, bringing out the wishes and tastes of Newcastle's industrialist elites. Indeed, their political influence and their civic choices shaped the Laing building and the gallery's early history, whilst their late-Victorian and Edwardian artistic preferences can still be felt strongly in the permanent collection. As Moore (2018) describes it,

> Galleries sought to reflect and shape the taste of a community, yet in reality they frequently reinforced the power of the private donor. Through municipal museums, the private collector's taste was rendered public, ensuring that the tastes of contemporary urban capitalists often became the canons of civic art.[3]

And yet, despite this main focus on Newcastle's elite community, the research has examined the similarities that existed between the Laing's management issues and those of other British provincial art galleries, especially the Walker, on the grounds that the Laing often chose it as a model. These comparisons have been enriched with discussions regarding the museum theory and practice of the time, and with details regarding the mechanisms of the British art market during the first half of the twentieth century. The intersection of social issues, politics and culture in the early history of the Laing makes it especially suitable as a case study illustrating the

Newcastle. Nevertheless, CBS soon realised that temporary exhibitions were far more popular amongst audiences than the sole permanent collection, whilst better suiting the gallery's educational goal. Indeed, most of the curatorial activity in the Laing was conditioned – as it still is nowadays - by the lack of sufficient space to carry out temporary exhibitions whilst having the permanent collection on display at the same time.

[3] Moore, J. (2018). *High culture and Tall Chimneys. Art institutions and urban society in Lancashire, 1780-1914.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.96

general evolution of local authority museums during the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, many of the aspects of the Laing that have been analysed (such as the ability to adapt to the challenges of changing historical circumstances, the taxation and funding issues and the difficult interaction between culture and politics) are common to most British regional galleries, so this thesis contributes to the growing scholarship about the significance of these institutions.

Nevertheless, the most remarkable outcome of this research has been rescuing CBS' legacy. Newcastle Council made an exception to its lack of financial commitment towards the creation of the Laing, by taking the decision – uncommon in local authority museums - to appoint a professional full-time paid curator.[4] This decision determined the early history of the gallery: the impact of CBS' curatorial work is the ultimate element shaping the character of the Laing collection. His sensible policy choices, his ability to make the most of the tastes of local patrons and to redirect the wishes of donors, together with the skilled use of the scarce funding and the insufficient and poorly trained staff, resulted in a coherent and cohesive collection of British painting. His insistence on the educational duty of art galleries and on the connection with audiences and the local art community succeeded in democratising the gallery and widening its cultural scope. Since its foundation, and despite the space limitations, the Laing became a hub which – similarly to modern museums – hosted talks, concerts and drawing competitions, whilst displaying examples of industrial arts that both promoted local industries and served as an inspiration for the designers and art students in the North-East. This flexibility in the use of the gallery space paved the way for the success of the experimental work taking place in wartime. Last but not least, CBS' efforts to network with artists and fellow curators, to keep in touch with the London art market and to follow the regulatory advice of the MA succeeded in overcoming Newcastle's geographical isolation and kept the Laing up to date with contemporary museum trends. Sadly, the Laing - which is still named after its founder and currently displays two busts of him - does not display any acknowledgement to CBS as the man who made the gallery's

[4] By the beginning of the twentieth century, most provincial art galleries relied on honorary curators acting on a voluntary basis. Even by the end of the 1920s, Sir H. Miers noted that only a 14% of the museums in the U.K. had full-time competent curators. See: Miers, H. (1928*). A Report on the Public Museums of the British Isles (other than the National Museums) to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees*. Edinburgh: T&A Constable, p.20.

permanent collection. This thesis has tried to demonstrate and pay tribute to the relevance of his work.

Learning from the past

In the late 1950s, the Laing, like most regional museums, tended to reject the early-twentieth century emphasis upon the importance of education and also the museological experimentation carried out during wartime, and to go back to the late-Victorian museum functions of conservation and display.[5] It is only since the end of the twentieth century that museological work has shifted its focus again towards audience feedback, inclusive cultural experiences and educational goals. Some of the activities carried out by local authority museums today (such as children's workshops, design exhibitions and events promoting community engagement) show a remarkable continuity with the work and ideas of the first half of the twentieth century. The galleries' past history can, therefore, be a source of inspiration for current museum practice in different ways.

Firstly, museum history can help art galleries to widen the understanding of their own permanent collections. The knowledge of the circumstances in which artworks and museum objects were acquired increases their significance and helps to improve their display, connecting current audiences with the historical and social context of the acquisitions. Secondly, early twentieth-century galleries tended to be more flexible in changing their displays and in using their reserve collections, so knowing some of those curatorial strategies and exhibition techniques can help current art galleries to achieve a more fluid approach to their permanent collections.[6] Thirdly, current curators can also learn from the professional practices of their early twentieth-century colleagues, who - because of the staff shortages and of their feeling of 'owning' their galleries - tended to have an increased interaction with audiences and to make efforts to keep museums popular, overcoming the tendency towards institutional isolation. In this sense, the old curatorial network, the exchange

[5] For a detailed analysis of the post-war reactions against museum experimentation, see: Pearson, C. (2017). *Museums in the Second World War: Curators, Culture and Change.* Oxon and New York: Routledge.
[6] For instance, in CBS' period, the Laing hosted nearly 300 temporary exhibitions, some of them lasting barely a week. On the negative side, there was a constant lack of resources, and a tendency to rely in improvisation which would not be acceptable for today's standards of public service.

of advice between art galleries, the development of regional strategies and the closer connection with patrons may be of help to museums of the present. Also, the awareness of curators' past problems may be rewarding. As North (1951) put it, 'there is encouragement to be derived from the realization that our generation of curators is not the only one that has been faced with difficulties or subjected to criticism.'[7]

Finally, looking back to the past can help those in charge to detect longstanding needs of regional art galleries that have not yet been fulfilled. The most pressing of them is probably the chronic underfunding, partly linked to the need for a national museum strategy, a more equitable distribution of funds between national and regional museums and an increased coordination with national museums that facilitates loans. A stronger networking with university museums and other regional galleries, as well as solving the deficiencies of the museum buildings would also be beneficial. In this way, regional museums like the Laing will be able to continue strengthening their dialogue with audiences, activating ideas, provoking thought and awakening knowledge and cultural awareness for a long time to come.

[7] North, F.J. (1951) 'On learning how to run a museum: on profiting from the experience of others.' *Museums Journal,* 61:4, p.282.

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